

ANNA MAY WONG AND HAZEL YING LEE –
TWO SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN
IN WORLD WAR II

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program:
Asian Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

June 2012

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee – Two Second-Generation Chinese American Women in World War II

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Degree awarded June 2012

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts

Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies

June 2012

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Applying a historical approach which contextualizes ethnic and gender perspectives, this thesis investigates the obstacles that second-generation Chinese American women encountered as they moved into the public sphere. This included sexual restraints at home and racial harassment outside. This study examines, as well, the opportunities that stimulated these women to break from their confinements.

Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee will serve as two role models among this second-generation of women who successfully combined their cultural heritage with their education in the U.S. Their contributions inspired a whole generation of young bi-cultural women of their time. I will argue that, although the second generation had gone through cultural acculturation and resistance toward American mainstream culture, they constructed their new Chinese American identity during World War II through a synthesis of their contribution to the gender relations and ethnic identification in nationalist project.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Professors Ina Asim and April Haynes for their assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. This thesis would not have been possible without their guidance and inspiration as I hurdle all the obstacles during the research work. Special gratitude is due to Professor Bryna Goodman, Director of the Asian Studies Program, who provides valuable input for revision of the thesis. I enjoyed my research at the Chinese American Museum, Los Angeles Public Library, and Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles. They house amazing collections concerning Anna May Wong and many other Chinese American women's experiences, and the library staff provided helpful service. I am also indebted to Collection Assistant of Museum of Chinese in America in New York City, Samantha Chin-Wolner, for her patience and persistence in gathering their Hazel Ying Lee core collection for me. This research was supported in part by the Todd-Wengert Memorial Award Funding from the Asian Studies Program at the University of Oregon.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of Chinese Americans could be dated back to the mid-19th century, when thousands of Chinese men left their hometown (most early Chinese immigrants came from Guangdong Province) for the United States to seek their fortunes during the California Gold Rush. It should be pointed out that the very day they landed on the new land, the Chinese immigrants were confronted with racial discrimination. As cheap laborers, they were initially welcomed but then posed a threat to employment opportunities for white men. Along with their Asian appearance, exotic apparel, and different language, Chinese immigrants were considered unassimilable aliens by the U.S. mainstream society. The hostile attitude therefore led to anti-Chinese legislation .

The year 1882 saw the passage of Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred the majority of Chinese from entering the United States except businessmen, diplomats, teachers and students. Similar Acts passed in 1902 and 1904 made Chinese exclusion permanent, and Chinese who were already in the United States not only were denied citizenship but were also abused, physically attacked and sometimes killed. It was not until 1943 that the passage of Magnuson Act ended the exclusion, which allowed 105 Chinese immigrants to enter the United States legally each year.

During the decades of exclusion, the population of second-generation Chinese Americans was a small. Despite their small number and voices muted by racism and

anti-immigration activities, the second-generation of Chinese Americans played a significant, although rarely acknowledged role, in the U.S. history. They have served as effective agents in Chinese American communities, especially in the category of socialization. Much of this process could be captured in the changes that occurred in language, education, familial relationships, social activities, professions, customs and traditions, as this generation of Chinese Americans were challenged in their daily lives. The second-generation of Chinese American women faced racial discrimination along with their male peers, but they also had to deal with the constrictions of Chinese cultural practices within the private sphere. Nevertheless, they had choices for their professional trajectories because they were exposed to women's emancipation and related intellectual discussions which were linked to the May Fourth Movement in China as well as the rising consciousness of feminism in the United States.

Contemporary definition of feminism is the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.¹ Ryan cites Charlotte Bunch's definition, describing feminism as a movement for the liberation of women, because women's oppression is deeply embedded in everything, and must be a movement for the transformation of the whole society.² It was in 1920 that the Women's Suffrage Movement in the United States achieved its success after century-long struggle. According to Suzanne M. Marilley, two decades' personal development for women finally resulted in

¹ "Feminism – Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary". <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>, Retrieved 28 May 2012.

² See Barbara Ryan, *Feminism and the Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology, and Activism*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which manifested a preliminary political achievement of the feminism.³ My discussion of feminism locates in the decades from the 1920s to 1940s in both China and the United States, focusing on the socioeconomic context in which Chinese American women seek, define, negotiate, and establish equal opportunities in education and employment. These new social conditions invited the second-generation of Chinese American women to reconsider their gender and ethnic identities within the masculine society where women were undervalued.

The Second World War became another turning point for this generation of Chinese Americans, especially the women. The war offered them a chance to be accepted by the American mainstream society through the opening of tremendous social and economic opportunities. It also aroused their patriotism to both China and United States within the discourse of Chinese nationalism. Nationalism arose among Chinese as a political awakening to the foreign invasion since the late Qing period when China was forced to open its door to the Western world. “A consciousness of a profound foreign threat to Chinese civilization developed among those who had most to do with these powerful foreigners especially Chinese in the coastal provinces and among the overseas Chinese. This planted the seeds of modern nationalism.”⁴ The decade of the 1920s witnessed a burgeoning modern nationalism which spread among

³ See Suzanne M Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996.

⁴ Lynn Pan, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.103.

the educated Chinese, not only in China but also overseas. For those Chinese immigrants in the United States, the occupation of their hometown such as Fujian and Guangdong provinces inspired them to support the political organizations and participate in patriotic activities within the Chinese American community. The break of the Second Sino-Japanese War from the early 1930s to 1945 brought unprecedented national sentiment among overseas Chinese. During these two decades, in contrast to their mothers' generation who were excluded from the workplace, the second-generation of Chinese American women who had received their education in American public schools, were ready to answer the call of the war and perform new social roles. It was the first time that a large number of Chinese American women were able to leave the restaurants, laundries, and grocery stores where their mothers had been confined, to assume various professions such as scientific research, medicine, aviation, etc. Engaging in the war along with American women of different ethnicities, the second-generation of Chinese American contributed to a better image of Chinese Americans and even the Chinese people as a whole.

The early scholarship on Chinese American women has largely focused on the first generation.⁵ Most of them unfolded various pictures in which these women lived

⁵ See, for example, Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*. San Francisco: Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, 1986; Sucheng Chan, "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943", in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991; Huping Ling, *Surviving On the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003; Jean Lau Chin, *Learning from My Mother's Voices- Family Legend and the Chinese American Experience*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2005.

as prostitutes, laborers or merchants' wives, and some as students.⁶ In light of race, class, and gender oppression, these studies tend to examine Chinese American women's subordinate status. Judy Yung's *Unbound Feet*, which was published in 1995, is the first in-depth historical study of Chinese American women. This book offers a chapter of second-generation Chinese American women, but its scope is limited to the 1920s. Four years later, Yung published *Unbound Voices*, which is a collection of letters, essays, poems, autobiographies, speeches, testimonials, and oral histories in Chinese American women's words. This book covers a wide range of research materials from the Gold Rush years to World War II, locating the war as a turning point for Chinese American women to expand their gender roles outside domestic area. The second-generation of Chinese American women, who were born during the first two decades of the 20th century, were more intertwined with topics such as gender, race, culture, career, identity.⁷ Among the existing scholarly works, these women's voices were rarely heard in the context of World War II. As Zhao Xiaojian notices, although the importance of the Second World War in American women's lives has been recognized for a long time, its impact on Chinese American

⁶ See, for example, Jacqueline Baker Barnhart, *The Fair But Fail: Prostitution in San Francisco, 1849-1900*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986; Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-century San Francisco*. Norman: University of Oklahoma University Press, 1994; Weili Ye, *Seeking modernity in China's name: Chinese students in the United States, 1900-1927*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; Stacey Bieler, *"Patriots" or "Traitors" A History of American-Educated Chinese Students*. New York: Me.E.Sharpe, 2003.

⁷ See, for example, Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; idem, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; Kevin Scott Wong; Sucheng Chan, ed., *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion Era*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998; Gloria Heyung Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000; Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002; Kevin Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005; Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, eds., *Chinese American Voices -- From the Gold Rush to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

women has been overlooked.⁸ Following up Yung's research, Zhao's chapter in *Remaking Chinese America* focuses on World War II particularly, to examine women's central role in Chinese American community development in terms of their employment in the larger society.⁹ In addition, there are a few other works that approach this topic.¹⁰ They either focus on weighing these women's contributions or examining their awakening national identity during the war.

Drawing on materials from primary sources as well as some secondary sources, I intend to develop a sketch of second-generation Chinese American women in the coming of World War II. I would like to see how social change occurred for them when their individual personalities intersected with socioeconomic circumstances, and how they differentiated themselves from their mothers in education and employment, which was effected by, meanwhile resulted in their shifting ethnic identity and gender views. To capture the historical and cultural background of the second-generation of Chinese American women before and during World War II, I apply a historical approach which contextualizes ethnic and gender perspectives, to investigate the obstacles they encountered, such as sexual restraints and home and racial harassment outside, as well as the opportunities, such as awakening feminist consciousness and women's liberation movement in the male-dominated society. The primary source I

⁸ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002. p.49.

⁹ See Xiaojian Zhao, "Women and World War II: The Making of a New Generation," in Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, pp.48-77.

¹⁰ Xiaojian Zhao, "Chinese American Women Defense Workers in World War II," *California History*, Vol.75, No.2, 1996, pp.138-153, 182-184; Him Mark Lai, "Roles Played By Chinese in America During China's Resistance to Japanese Aggression and During World War II," *Chinese America: History & Perspectives*, 1997.

am looking at is the San Francisco Chinatown's newspaper – *Chinese Digest*– the first English-language publication for Chinese Americans, together with some other published Chinese and English materials which document the situations in both China and the United States.

The *Chinese Digest* was published from 1935 to 1940, and Thomas Chinn, a second-generation Chinese American, was the founder. According to Judy Yung, the *Chinese Digest* addressed the second generation Chinese Americans with progressive views and numerous features on women, education, healthcare, recreation, and other community concerns.¹¹ As a running historical record of the activities of the Chinese in San Francisco, the *Chinese Digest* emphasized the changing lifestyle of the Chinese Americans especially the second-generation, including the things they did, the places they went to, and their thoughts and feelings, as Julie Shuk-Yee Lam observes.¹² Gloria Chun also evaluates the *Chinese Digest* as “a crucial conduit through which young second-generation of Chinese Americans could voice their thoughts and feelings.”¹³ Major developments or issues that were related to Chinatown were covered in detail, such as social welfare developments, Japanese invasion of China, fund-raising for China refugee relief, etc. In addition to these topics, the publication also recorded people's feelings toward the emergent social problems, such as the

¹¹ Judy Yung. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p.11.

¹² See Julie Shuk-Yee Lam, “The *Chinese Digest*, 1935-1940,” in Chinese Historical Society of America; San Francisco State University. Asian American Studies Dept, et al., *Chinese America: History and Perspectives 1987*, San Francisco, CA: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1987, p.119-137.

¹³ Gloria H. Chun, “Go West...to China”: Chinese American Identity in the 1930s, in K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan et al., *Claiming American: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998, p165.

loneliness of single men, the career aspiration of Chinese American women, the frustrations of children having to attend both American and Chinese schools, and conflicts within the family. Through the trend of activities and sociological statistics of the education facilities which were reported in the publication, it opened a window for people to observe the acculturation process of the second-generation Chinese Americans. Thus, the *Chinese Digest* became a major research source for me to investigate the lives and thoughts of the second-generation Chinese American women during the late 1930s.

Joan Scott's definition of gender as "an analytical category" has laid a theoretical foundation for my thesis.¹⁴ As a grammatical concept, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society allocates to men and women. Therefore, the study of gender should go beyond the study of women. According to Scott, gender not only involves the issues of masculinity, femininity, sexuality, but also signifies "relationships of power," through which we can "understand complex connections among various forms of human interaction." Based on Scott's discussion, my thesis considers gender relationship within the power structure that intertwines with race, class, and ethnicity. The investigation of women's interaction with feminism embraces their changing gender identities and gendered power relations both at home and in the public sphere. The second-generation of Chinese American women claimed their femininity not only through their presence in

¹⁴ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, Vol.91, No.5, December 1986, pp.1053-75.

the Chinese American community but also their cultural and corporeal connection to China as well as the white society. Moreover, the global concept of the Modern Girl also inspires the integration of feminism, nationalism, and ethnicity in this paper.¹⁵ The case studies also illuminate the relationship between feminism and nationalism, and the constitution of nation in gender difference.¹⁶

Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee will serve as two role models among this first generation of women who successfully combined their Chinese cultural heritage with their education in the U.S. Their cultural background, such as connections to Chinese tradition through their first generation Chinese immigrant parental families in the United States is examined in the beginning as a cultural context. Then I will discuss their integration into American culture through their education as well as other social activities. These discussions will be contextualized with feminist issues and theories of the 1920s and 1930s which shaped their ideas and contributed to their dedication to particular professions: Anna May Wong was the first Asian American film star in Hollywood; Hazel Ying Lee became a pilot for the American Women Air-force Service during World War II. Their contributions potentially inspired a whole generation of young bi-cultural women of their time. The investigation will demonstrate how they constructed their distinct gender and ethnic identities as two role models of second-generation Chinese American women. I will argue that,

¹⁵ See Modern Girl Around the World Research Group ed., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008.

¹⁶ See Mrinalini Sinha, "Gender and Nation," in Bonnie G. Smith ed., *Women's History in Global Perspective*, Vol.1, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004, p.257.

although the second generation had gone through cultural resilience and resistance toward American mainstream culture, they constructed their new Chinese American identity during World War II through a synthesis of their contribution to the gender relations and ethnic identification as U.S. citizens who engaged in a Chinese nationalist project – the Second Sino-Japanese War.

With regard to the role models, I refer to biographical works on Anna May Wong, and also a handful of articles published in historical newspapers and periodicals, such as *The Los Angeles Times* (1923-1945 File), *Motion Pictures Magazine* (1930), *Pictures Magazine* (1926), *New Movie Magazine* (1932), etc. I will also examine some of her representative film works to provide a more comprehensive view about her. For Hazel Ying Lee, I include her letter to her sister Frances Tong in 1944, and some articles from the *Oregonian* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Some other documentations on Women Air-force Service Pilots are also included to investigate her activities and contributions.

In the first chapter, I start with the historical background of the second-generation Chinese Americans in the context of the Exclusion era. Decades of anti-Chinese and anti-immigrant movements and legislation culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, effectively barring Chinese immigration. Discrimination was the primary obstacle for this generation of women to seek a job in American society. On the other hand, the Chinese heritage rooted in the immigrant parents' generation contributed to their opposition of women's public exhibition. *Li*

(ritual) embodied the proper social etiquette in the patriarchal society of traditional China. Female had more limited roles than their male counterparts and were required to be obedient. In terms of their sphere of activity, women were expected to remain out of the public eye, “within the ‘baton doors’ which marked the entrances to the women’s quarters in the larger households.”¹⁷ As a result, their opportunities to engage in public affairs were deprived and so were their aspirations to legitimate public identity.

The second chapter looks into the opportunities for these women to walk out of the private space. To do so, I will focus on the first three decades in the 20th century by examining three issues. The first is the women's liberation movement in the Republic of China, which influenced the Chinese American women to a large extent. The second is the appearance of Modern Girls and New Women in the United States during the 1920s and the 1930s. The third is China’s war of resistance against Japan since the early 1930s and the United States’ official entry into World War II in later years. The war allowed the second-generation of Chinese American women to participate in the public arena and obtain working chances.

The third chapter focuses on Anna May Wong specifically. Her career as the first Asian American film star in Hollywood was not a product of the war but more related to gender issues both in America and China as I discussed in the second section. Most literature on Anna May Wong evaluates her dilemma as one between Orientalism and

¹⁷ Charlotte Beahan, “The Women’s Movement and Nationalism in Late Ch’ing China,” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976, p.5.

Occidentalism and cultural identity by researching her controversial roles through an abundant filmography. Rather than judging her involvement in damaging China's international image, I tend to examine Anna May Wong's contribution to China and the projection in the United States through her gender and ethnic identities which were revealed in her cinematic performances as well as other social activities within the discourses of orientalism, feminism, and ethnicity. Her effort to establish her cinematic career in the United States revealed the shifting racial, gender, and sexual boundaries in the Chinese American community and the broader society before and during World War II. Her life and career shows us how the Chinese American identity was shaped and established upon the integration of hybrid Chinese American practices, American Orientalism, and Chinese ethnicity.

The fourth chapter shifts to another heroine, Hazel Ying Lee, who became the first Chinese-American woman to fly for the United States military. Her career option fits into the theoretical discourse of women and nation. My analysis of her military engagement contextualizes her experience from a gender perspective. Then I will show her intention to fly for the Chinese Air Force in response to the Japanese aggression against China in 1933, and the failure of her plan because of cultural restrictions. Her military career officially began with the foundation of the Women Air-force Service Pilots (WASP) in 1943. Rather than exploring her ethnic identity in articulating patriotism to both China and the United States, this chapter focuses more on the construction of her gender identity within the discourse of Chinese nationalism.

Through an examination of the limited resources available on her during World War II, I will sort out her transnational identity beyond her daily activities and flying missions. Her untimely death in an aviation accident in 1944 unfortunately does not allow us to observe her patriotic dedication to both China and the United States.

CHAPTER II

ENCOUNTERING OBSTACLES

To consider the difficulties which the second-generation Chinese American women were facing before they had the chance to seek public presence, the historical and socioeconomic background of the early Chinese American community should be examined at the first place. Chinese American women of the second-generation held similarity but also presented noticeable differences from their mothers' generation. On the one hand, both of them were oppressed by the Confucian feminine virtue which required them to be obedient daughters and submissive wives at home as well as racial discrimination outside. On the other hand, the American-born Chinese girls got more access to American mainstream culture and education, which enabled them to seek different ethnicity and femininity from their mothers. To venture into the public area, they had to break the cultural, gender, and racial boundaries which confined them in the domestic place.

During the era of the California Gold Rush (1848–1855), the first tide of Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States. From that time on, the Chinese population saw a rapid increase in California, which then constituted one of the largest Chinese communities in the United States. As reported, from 1850 to 1900, more than 100,000 Chinese came to mine gold, build railroads, farm, and start businesses. The number of Chinese women, though much smaller compared to male immigrants, reached this continent almost at the same period. In the four decades after the first Chinese woman

was recorded as having arrived in the United States in 1834, almost 4,574 Chinese women immigrants reached the U.S. and decided to settle throughout the states of California, Nevada, Hawaii and Idaho.¹⁸ However, the ratio of women was still very low among the total Chinese immigrants. As Judy Yung reports, compared to 4,018 Chinese men in San Francisco in the 1850s there were only seven Chinese women. The number grew to 1,784 among 33,149 immigrants in a decade, still only about 2%.¹⁹ That is to say, very few women were in the first wave of Chinese immigrants to the United States in the mid-19th century.

The number of early Chinese immigrant women was so small for several reasons. First, the income of the Chinese laborers was so minimal that they could not support their wives. Most of the male immigrants were from poor families, and they came to the United States by signing labor contracts with Chinese human traffickers. They could not afford the traveling expenses of their wives from their hometown in China to California. Moreover, they figured that their wives' living expenses were far less in China than they would be in the United States. Second, in China and Chinese American communities, filial piety was highly valued and rigidly observed. Few challenged the social order which held men responsible for the maintenance of families and women for taking care of their parents and children. Therefore, it was almost impossible for women to leave for an unknown land while their families were

¹⁸ Ling Huping, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998, p.1.

¹⁹ Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, 1986, p.14.

enduring mental, physical, and socioeconomic oppression in the late *Qing* period. Third, later federal legislation played an important role in prohibiting Chinese women to enter the United States. Early in 1875, the Congress enforced the Page Act, which was the first federal immigration law to selectively accept the entry of Chinese immigrants.

As Sucheng Chan tells us, the Page Act was intended to prevent Chinese women from venturing to the United States as prostitutes. She states that “the Page Law in large measure did succeed in reducing the influx of Chinese women alleged to be prostitutes,” however unfortunately, its main impact “fell not on prostitutes but on other groups of Chinese women.”²⁰ Economic depression, unemployment, and discrimination led to the enactment of laws restricting the work opportunities, living places, and civil rights of Chinese immigrants. Decades of anti-Chinese and anti-immigrant discrimination and legislation culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, effectively barring Chinese immigrants. Only a privileged few groups, including merchants’ wives and daughters, were able to knock on the door of the United States. Following the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Congress enacted a series of immigration laws to restrict Chinese immigrants, including the Scott Act of 1888, the Geary Act of 1892, and the Quata Act of 1924. In so doing, large numbers of Chinese, especially female, were denied entry to the U.S.

²⁰ Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943”, pp.94-106, in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, p.109.

Moreover, considering the anti-Chinese sentiment that many people experienced in the West, it was too dangerous for Chinese women and children to live here.²¹

The absence of early Chinese immigrant women resulted in a predominantly male population, which further contributed to a bachelor society. However, this is not to equate the early Chinese American community as a homogeneous masculine society. According to Joan Scott discussion of gender as a category, the usage of gender as a substitute for women suggests that the study of women implies the study of men, and women's world is part of, and is created in, the men's world. Therefore, she encourages the feminist historians to reimagine gender as a category, which will lead to historization and deconstruction of the dominant ideology like male/female, masculine/feminine, and sexuality, while also place it within the context of broader societal institutions, revealing power structures which are connected to race, class, and ethnicity. Chinese American women's voice could not be neglected in considering the gender identities in the bachelor society.

Until the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, the population of the second-generation Chinese Americans was kept to a relatively small scale and had low natural growth due to limited numbers of women. Although the mid-19th century saw the beginning of large immigration from China to the United States, the second generation of Chinese Americans came to maturity only in the 1920s.²² Similar to their parents' generation, the second generation of Chinese Americans also

²¹ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, Boston: Twayne, 1991, p. 105.

²² Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.106.

encountered racial discrimination at schools and workplaces. Being naturalized American citizens, fluent in English, and familiar with American culture, this younger generation had great potential and also the desire to interact with American communities and participate in public activities. However, they faced a cultural dilemma with trying to prove their American identity and trying to honor their Chinese heritage. As Kevin Scott Wong notes, American society was ruled by the ideology of assimilation rather than cultural pluralism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.²³ One noticeable conduct is the miscegenation laws in the United States that successfully prohibited Chinese from marrying white Americans to maintain white supremacy from the 1880s to the late 1930s, which led to race segregation between the Chinese Americans and the American whites.²⁴ No matter how desperately they tried to acculturate to the American mainstream culture and claim their American identity, they were relentlessly regarded as “unassimilable aliens and perpetual foreigners” just as much as their immigrant parents.²⁵ Therefore, when they tried to establish their career after finishing school, they often could not find work outside the market already associated with immigrants.

In view of the ubiquitous racial discrimination in the United States, the daughters of the early Chinese women immigrants – the second generation of Chinese American

²³ Kevin Scott Wong, and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion Era*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998, p.144

²⁴ See Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.144-45.

women who were born and raised in the United States, received the same undesirable treatments as their male peers. Many young girls of this generation considered being American as a physical and mental liberation from Chinese cultural practices which restricted women within the private sphere. Some of them were eager to keep up with Western fashion, learn to dance, participate in sports, and date, struggling to avoid the tradition of arranged marriage which was still seen in Chinese American community. Despite their educational attainment and English fluency, most Chinese American women could not find jobs in the larger American society, but serve as elevator girls, stock girls, Oriental hostess, and housemaids within Chinatown.²⁶ Only a few of them were able to break the racial barriers to enter new professions, such as medicine, education, social work, as pioneers. Frustrated by the limited opportunities in the United States, some Chinese American women joined the troop to serve for China with their bilingual abilities and professional knowledge. Although seen a markedly different experience in their historical background and educational achievement, the second-generation of Chinese American girls found their life was as miserable as their mothers'. For women of this generation, to escape traditional Chinese regulations on female behavior was not as easy as reconciling with the American mainstream cultural practice. Not only were they bound to Confucian norms, rooted in their parental families, but they also suffered violence from anti-Chinese forces. These factors together confined their daily activities to the private spaces in Chinatowns.

²⁶ Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, p.49.

As in China, Chinese women in Chinese communities in the United States were expected to stay at home and avoid public appearance. As it is pointed out, in Imperial China, a strict family structure and a gendered division of labor was highly valued and strictly observed, where men were supposed to manage affairs outside the home, while women were confined to the domestic place and to handle household responsibilities.²⁷ The “three obediences” were basic doctrines for women to follow: a Chinese woman should obey her father as a daughter at home, obey her husband as a wife after marriage, and obey her son in widowhood. Moreover, Chinese women were also required to cultivate the “four virtues” of “morality, proper speech, appearance, and diligent work.” In terms of such a patriarchal society, women were expected to be good wives and loving mothers at home who were responsible for maintaining their families. As for the majority of women, their central household tasks were “chores, sewing, cooking, arranging the furniture, and designing the home and garden.”²⁸ The domestic sphere was the main stage for women and revealed the meaning of their roles, while there were still a few women, such as entertainers or courtesans, were able to establish their careers to pursue an independent life outside the strict confines of the family.²⁹ In the early decades of 20th century, new economic opportunities and the spread of self-consciously modern ideologies invited

²⁷ See Bryna Goodman; Wendy Larson, “Introduction: Axes of Gender: Divisions of Labor and Spatial Separation,” in Bryna Goodman; Wendy Larson, et al., *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005, pp.1-5.

²⁸ Michael Lestz, Cheng Pei-Kai, “Fascism in China, 1925-1938: A Documentary Study” (unpublished ms.), pp.372-73. Quoted in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, Norton, 1990, p.416.

²⁹ Wilt Idema; Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2004, p.174.

Chinese women to adjust their gender roles, seeking modern education and employment in the public realm.³⁰

Generally, the first generation of Chinese immigrant women transnationalized Confucianism by accepting its legitimacy for their lives in the United States. The Chinese American transnationalism not only refers to the physical connection between and capital flow from Chinese American community to China through those who were able to travel back and forth from the U.S. to China, but also involves ethnic consciousness such as how Chinese Americans negotiated Chinese-ness and American-ness beyond their U.S. citizenship and Chinese cultural baggage. Reinforcing Confucianism in the Chinese American community encouraged them to confront with racial discrimination and establish ethnic identification in a transnational context. However, among the early immigrant women, there were some who were more Westernized and formed constant contact with non-Chinese neighborhood.³¹

In reaction to the abolishment of Confucianism during the May Fourth Movement, many Chinese in the United States cabled the Chinese government, arguing that “Chinese civilization is rooted in Confucianism. To abolish Confucianism is to commit national suicide, for such an act cuts off the fountainhead for Chinese civilization. Education should make Confucianism its principal content.

³⁰ Bryna Goodman; Wendy Larson, “Introduction: Axes of Gender: Divisions of Labor and Spatial Separation,” p.4.

³¹ Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, p.49.

We hereby beg you to keep it.”³² Suffering from unbearable racial prejudice and cultural discrimination, these Chinese Americans appreciated their original cultural heritage since “it provided the most appropriate framework for a rich and harmonious life and that nothing was superior to it.”³³ According to the recollection of Jade Snow Wong, daughter of a Chinese immigrant family, her father firmly believed that nothing could challenge “the practice [practical] experience of the Chinese, who for thousands of years have preserved a most superior [type] of family pattern.”³⁴ Ruled by Confucian social order, Chinese communities in America also highlighted men’s privilege in both domestic and public places. The Confucian hierarchy recognized patriarchal authority by delegating the power to control women groups and of the younger generation to elite men, who not only managed public affairs in Chinatown but also regulated family affairs. Chinese immigrant women found that they were excluded from the power structure: in the patriarchal kinship system, only men could take charge of the clan and district associations, manage businesses among guilds and tongs (secret societies).³⁵

Since taking care of family affairs was the priority for the immigrant women, most of whom came to the United States either as merchants’ wives or later the wives of laborers, they found themselves housebound and could hardly engage in any public

³² *Chinese World*, September 22, 1916.

³³ Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*, University of Illinois Press, 2002, p.120.

³⁴ Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995, p.128.

³⁵ Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.25.

activities. Lacking basic language and work skills, having no independent financial support, and restricted by traditional gender roles, the early immigrant women resigned themselves to cultural constraints and familial responsibilities, managing house chores, nurturing children, and serving their husbands. Apart from the immigrant women who were smuggled to the United States as prostitutes, most other Chinese women, if lucky, could undertake non-technical piecework for subcontractors at home: sewing, washing, rolling cigars, peeling shrimp, and making slippers and brooms, etc.³⁶ These tasks indicated the flourishing service industry in Chinatown which consisted of restaurants, laundries, and grocery stores. As feminist criticism of the public/private dichotomy has presented, there were many factors relegating women to an inferior position, such as class, race, sexuality, institutional setting, place, and time.³⁷ That is to say, female devaluation is a universal issue and is not only observed in cultural conservatism in Chinese heritage. Considering these unfavorable conditions, it was impossible for the first generation of Chinese immigrant women to claim an independent identity and adapt themselves to the new world.

Given the rigid social and cultural restrictions, along with racial and sex discrimination, most early Chinese immigrant women suffered tremendous hardship in the United States. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that gender roles within the

³⁶ Ibid., p.26.

³⁷ Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby, eds., *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. Quoted in Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.86.

immigrant families witnessed a gradual transformation. On the one hand, the companionate marriage which was embraced by a large number of American families set an example for the modernization of husband/wife relationship within Chinese American community. In *Making Marriage Modern*, Christina Simmons explores the development of companionate marriage in the United States, which advocated sexual and psychological equality between men and women, confirmed freedom and privacy between the couples, and validated birth control, thus disaggregating the couple from traditional extended families to some degree.³⁸ On the other hand, the bonds between the traditional extended families in China and the independent family units in the United States were loosened. The survival of a family relied very much on the collaboration between husband and wife. Accordingly, those immigrant women were no longer bound to the authority of their parents or parents-in-law, which allowed them to become providers of their families just like their husbands and exercise more control in their households. As a Chinese immigrant woman, Helen Hong Wong said, “It’s better to be a woman in America,” she continued, “At least you can work here and rule the family along with your husband. In China it’s considered a disgrace for a woman to work, and it’s the mother-in-law who rules.”³⁹ Although the women suffered discrimination and oppression, they experienced a growing equality and increasing financial independence. Therefore, the immigrant experience in the United

³⁸ See Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women’s Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.105-37.

³⁹ Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, p.44.

States was a double-edge sword for women of Chinese descents in the early 20th century.

Compared to their sisters in China, this generation of immigrant women had changed their circumstances for the better, which had been noticed by their daughters. Jane Kwong Lee argued that the early immigrant women had demonstrated real pioneer and revolutionary spirit when tearing themselves away from home and their family bands in order to come to a foreign land.⁴⁰ Using the pen name *Lady P'ing Yu*, Columnist Alice Fong Yu wrote the "Jade Box" to express women's voices before and during the Sino-Japanese war. In the article she stated how Chinese immigrant women distinguished themselves from the inhibited Chinese women in the days of the late *Qing* period, especially in seeking freedom to choose marry or remain single. "Broadly speaking, she marries because she knows that marriage is a natural state. ... In spite of careers to occupy her intellectual life, she is able to accord to marriage and motherhood its proper place in her life."⁴¹ Through the American-born Chinese women's voices, they had benefited from their mothers' transnational lessons. They admired the early immigrant women who made painstaking efforts to settle down in this unknown land, which allowed them to avoid the Confucian moral order that highlighted women's virtue as good wives and love mothers. Although racism was pervasive in the United States, many second-generation Chinese American women believed that life in the U.S. was better than in China, where they could seek free

⁴⁰ Jane Kwong Lee, "Chinese Women in San Francisco," *The Chinese Digest*, Vol.4, No.6, June, 1938, p.8.

⁴¹ P'ing Yu, "The Jade Box," *Chinese Digest*, Vol.3, No.6, June, 1937, p.8.

love, companionate marriage, equal education and employment. From this point, identifying with American culture had more to do with feelings that emerged from their interpretations about Confucian feminine virtue which was cultivated by their parents at home and less to do with their marginalized status in the United States.

In contrast to their mothers' generation, the second-generation women as naturalized U.S. citizens grew up without bound feet and cultural oppression. They could speak fluent English, receive a formal education in public schools, and adapt themselves to the U.S. pop culture. Born with these advantages, this generation aspired to fulfill the dreams which their mothers had not dared to expect: to represent for themselves, breaking gender prejudice, obtaining equal education and working opportunities, being involved in political and social activities, etc. However, due to cultural conflicts at home and racism outside, they also encountered obstacles in achieving a real American identity, to think and behave as the Caucasian women, to seek equal economic and political rights in the larger society, and to be received and identified as equal U.S. citizens as the White people. Their cultural dilemma is probably the worst predicament that lasted in their childhood memories. As a generation that regarded their cultural legacy as the most important connection with their motherland, the Chinese immigrant parents attempted to instill their traditional values in their children. Not only did they learn to speak Chinese, eat Chinese food, and celebrate Chinese holidays, the girls were expected to abide by the "three obediences and four virtues" and follow in their mothers' footsteps to be good wives

and caring mothers.⁴² Rebellion against their parents and any other inappropriate behavior were thought shameful and punishable in accordance to the acknowledged Confucian rules. Therefore, the second-generation of Chinese American girls were also confined in their homes to help their mothers with household duties or needleworks as “inner-helpers.”

As the second-generation of Chinese American girls grew older and got more access to western ideas and lifestyles through public schools and church activities, they often went against their parents’ expectations to become self-disciplined Chinese girls. The new ideals that they assimilated from the American society, such as women’s freedom to receive modern education, to work, and to be accepted for their own achievements, encouraged them to resist the conservative norms and practices of their immigrant parents. Moreover, caught in the conflicts between two cultures and the constraint of racial prejudice, Chinese Americans, like other second-generation children, experienced identity dilemmas when they tried to negotiate between their Chinese origin and the American milieu.⁴³ Their bicultural status invited them to find their own ethnic niche and create their own Chinese American identity. The discussion about their identity occupied second generation Chinese Americans extensively as examples from the publications which were popular in the Chinese American community at the time shows. In 1936 the *Chinese Digest* published a series of essays with the topic “Does My Future Lie in China or America?”: in which

⁴² Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.108.

⁴³ Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.115.

the author of the winning essay, Robert Dunn, a Chinese American student from Harvard University, expressed his ambivalent attitude.

Since I can remember, I have been taught by my parents, by my Chinese friends, and by my teacher in Chinese school, that I must be patriotic to China. ... However, I feel there is another side to the picture. I owe much pride and gratitude to America for the principles of liberty and equality which it upholds, for the protection its government has given me, and for its schools and institutions in which I have participated. Without them, I certainly would not be what I am now.⁴⁴

By covering the conflicts that the second-generation Chinese American encountered in their bi-cultural education, the *Chinese Digest* met the readers' needs to share their own experience which mirrored the identity dilemma of this generation. It also provided a context for the contemporary readers to understand the psychological and cultural rift Chinese Americans found themselves in at that time. From this generation's experience, reconciliation between both cultures was not an easy process. In Pardee Lowe's words, "It was difficult to be a [piously] filial Chinese son and a good American citizen at one and the same time."⁴⁵ To the Chinese American women of the second-generation, behaving like a traditional Chinese girl meant a disregard of the American cultural practices.

On the whole, for the second-generation of Chinese American women, the cultural conflict was caught between a strict adherence to traditional Chinese gender roles which emphasized women's place at home and rebellious feminists who dared to speak in public. Considering the strong racial discrimination, it was difficult for them

⁴⁴ Robert Dunn, "Does My Future Lie in China or America?" *The Chinese Digest*, Vol.2, No.20, May 5, 1936, p.3.

⁴⁵ Pardee Lowe, *Father and Glorious Descendant*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1943, p.142-43.

to assume any professions outside the Chinatowns. In terms of orienting their position in American society, to develop a new Chinese American identity in the transnational context seems to have been the only available strategy.

CHAPTER III

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the racial harassment suffered in the context of a hostile racial environment and sexual restraints of their personal lives experienced at home, the second-generation of Chinese American women embraced a rising feminist consciousness in the United States since the 1920s. This chapter looks into the opportunities which encouraged these women to walk out of the limitation of their domestic space: the nationalist movement in China and the women's movement in the United States; China's War of Resistance against Japan since the early 1930s, and the United States' entry into World War II in later years, formed a third context for the second-generation of Chinese American women in which they participated in the public arena and obtained employment opportunities. In light of this background, these women confronted traditional Chinese feminine morals and pursued individual freedom, and promoted egalitarian views regarding gender identity and social moral order.

The awakening of self-consciousness among the second-generation of Chinese American women was closely tied to the rising of nationalism and demands of women's liberation in the Republic of China since the 1910s. The sentiment of nationalism which grew among the politically conscious segments of a modern China provided women with an opportunity for organized activities beyond the household,

often in roles of public leadership.⁴⁶ Greatly influenced by the turbulent situation in China following the foreign invasions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the pervasive racial discrimination in the U.S., the second-generation of Chinese American women were convinced just like their parents' generation that only a stronger and more modern China could prepare them to withstand racism in American society. Along with the changing lifestyles they had experienced in the United States, the second-generation of Chinese American women made efforts to break the sexual boundaries in the masculine society, answering the call of the Chinese nationalist movement which advocated women's emancipation as a method to achieve the modernization of Chinese society. As Yung summarizes, the "New Women", whose status was elevated to an extent that they could become educated mothers and productive citizens, represented the nationalist effort to strengthen and defend China against foreign encroachment.⁴⁷ Therefore, women's liberation in China was of their primary concern and reshaped their definition of gender identity in the early decades of 20th century.

The women's liberation movement in China can be traced back to the beginning the first attempts of government reform. It was during the Hundred Days' Reform (1898) that women's emancipation was propagated as a slogan. The reformers regarded women's liberation as a prerequisite for self-strengthening for China, which welcomed women to better serve the society and build the country. The following

⁴⁶ Beahan, "The Women's Movement and Nationalism in Late Ch'ing China," p.319.

⁴⁷ Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.53.

decade witnessed a major step forward of the women's liberation movement. Education overseas opened a door for some women to familiarize with western feminist ideas and publicize them back in China for the sake of social changes. Inspired by the Xinhai Revolution (1911), some Chinese intellectuals adopted Marxist Feminism and interpreted it to fit China's situation. In Louise Edwards's words, to imagine a modern China, the intellectuals policed the modern woman as a symbolic attempt to police the boundaries of national governance to ensure these included virtue and education.⁴⁸ The *Journal of Natural Justice* (Tianyi Bao) and the journal *Fubao* published some Marxist-feminist articles, which explored women's oppression and potential liberation. They argued that "the contemporary world is self-centered, among which the economic issue is a major obstacle. The self-reliance of people can be applied only through economic equality."⁴⁹ In discussing women's liberation versus social revolution, they held that the most important inequality was gender inequality. Only through the sexual revolution which centered on reducing the unequal relationships between men and women, they saw the possibility to achieve a fair and moral world.⁵⁰

The spread of Marxist feminist ideas occurred simultaneously with the May Fourth Movement in the late 1910s. The New Culture Movement, which aimed to

⁴⁸ Louise Edwards, "Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China," *Modern China*, Vol.26, No.2, April 2000, p.123.

⁴⁹ "当今世界，然自私之世界也，其一大阻力。若平等，人人得以自立，" *Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui Funu Yundong Lishi Yanjiushi ed., Zhongguo Jindai Funu Yundong Lishi Ziliao*, 1840-1918, Beijing: Zhongguo Funu Chubanshe, 1991, p.277.

⁵⁰ "居今日之中国，非男女革命与族政治革命并行，亦不得合于真公," *ibid.*, p.290.

overthrow traditional Chinese culture, motivated women to get rid of patriarchal doctrines and seek individual freedom. Represented by Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, Xiang Jingyu, the early Chinese Marxists advocated women's liberation movement through the *New Youth* and many other revolutionary magazines. Hu Shi, a famous scholar who got acquainted with women who considered themselves modern during his education in the United States, led discussion of women's liberation in China. In his discussion about "problems of the women," he argued that women's deprivation of freedom and development should be considered as a social disease.⁵¹ He described the society in which women were oppressed as a half-paralyzed patient. In this metaphor, women were identified as having equal importance with men, which supported his ideas of women's equality. In Hu Shi's feminist ideas, women were encouraged to seek freedom and independence, like men. Thus, the first step was to receive equal education. The second step was theorizing women as useful members of society. On October 15, of the year 1919, the *Journal of Young China* issued an article "Problems of Allowing Female Students to Enter College," which was written by Hu Shi. In this article, he not only suggested inviting knowledgeable female professors to Chinese universities, but he also recommended the reform of the academic system in favor of female students, which allowed them to register for the preparatory courses in college.⁵² Chen Hengzhe, one of the Chinese students who had returned from the United States, was offered a professorship in Peking University, thus becoming the

⁵¹ Shi Hu, *Hu Shi Wen Ji*, Vol. 12, Peking University Press, 1998, p.579.

⁵² Ibid., Vol.11, p.44.

first female professor who was appointed in China. Female admission to higher education drew Chinese women into public sphere, familiarized them with new values such as freedom, independence, and sexual equality, and encouraged them to participate more actively in the nationalist movement. From this point, women found their position and sought gender equality in the professions which used to be dominated by male elites.

The newly adopted gender views of Chinese women further emancipated their social life, which greatly influenced their allies – the other modern girls around the world, including those second-generation Chinese American women who could either be categorized into American flappers or Chinese *Modeng Xiaojie*. As a global phenomenon, the appearance of modern girls was incorporated with “multidirectional citation” – mutual yet asymmetrical influences and circuits of exchange of female figures and representations that produce common figurations and practices in different geographical locations around the world.⁵³ In Republic China, young women started to receive education and join work force in public spaces, playing new roles in society. Their new gender roles involved the dynamics such as Modern Girl fashions, images, behaviors, and ideologies. Driven by a strong sense of Chinese nationalism, many daughters joined their mothers in fund-raising campaigns in Chinese American

⁵³ The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, “The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device: Collaboration, Connective Comparison, Multidirectional Citation,” in *The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group* (Alys Eve Weinbaum; Lynn M. Thomas; Priti Ramamurthy; Uta G. Poiger; Madeleine Yue Dong; and Tani E. Barlow, et al.) *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, pp.1-7.

community for Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution and for war and famine relief during the period of the Xinhai Revolution.⁵⁴

Due to the tough situation of late Qing dynasty, many Chinese social elites and politicians sojourned in the United States, seeking public forums to express their ideas for a modern China. They found newspapers in the United States to arouse sympathy and patriotic sentiment in Chinese American community. One of the influential publications was the San Francisco Chinese weekly *Mon Hing Bo* (*Wen Xin Bao*), which was controlled the Chinese Empire Reform Association founded by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. In 1899, the title of the publication was changed to *Chinese World* (*Sai Gai Yat Po*), and was published in San Francisco from 1909 to 1969. C.K. Leang (Liang Chaojie), the leader of the Chinatown literati community, was the editor. As a political platform of the Chinese Democratic Constitutionalist Party, the *Chinese World* represented the Chinatown elites and supported for a republican for of Chinese government. It also set the precedent for political party supported newspapers, such as *Young China Morning Post* (*Zhongguo Shao Nian Chen Bao*), which was controlled by *Tong Meng Hui* and Guomindang since 1910.⁵⁵ As a mouthpiece of the political organizations, these publications represented the shifting political stands in China, including women's liberation for a modernized China, and also influenced the public opinions in the Chinese American community.

⁵⁴ Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.160.

⁵⁵ See Wei Chi Poon, "Digging up Buried History from the Chinese Community," Retrieved from <http://coolessay.org/docs/index-85807.html?page=2>, May 29, 2012.

Women's voices in China potentially affected the gender views and practices of the generation who were in the United States: companionate marriage, equal education, and job. As authors' publishing in the *Chinese World* pointed out, the women's liberation movement helped to send well educated and virtuous women into tea houses and salons, where they talked about politics with men.⁵⁶ Although some reformists such as Liang Qichao advocated women's liberation to some extent for China's modernization,⁵⁷ the *Chinese World* played a role in preserving Confucianism and defending a hierarchical society. As Shehong Chen notes, "The cable sent to the Chinese government and the editorial in Chinese World highlighted the centrality of Confucianism in American Chinese life."⁵⁸ Women's presence in the dominant male territory was seen as a threat to the Confucian moral order, which was not only protested by many Chinese men but also opposed by Chinese American men. When the Chinese American men were fighting for their rights to live and to vote in the United States in 1920, the Chinese American women, who were far behind the White American women who had won suffrage, fought for freedoms – "the freedom to not behave according to Chinese customs, to choose their own mates, to work, and to be recognized for their individual achievements."⁵⁹ In order to achieve upward mobility from domestic area to workplace, the second-generation of Chinese

⁵⁶ *Chinese World*, June 29, 1920.

⁵⁷ See Yanli Huang, "Written Statement on Re-understanding Liang Qichao (1)," *Journal of Literature, History and Philosophy*, No.3, 2004.

⁵⁸ Shehong Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism in American Chinese Ideology," in Sucheng Chan ed., *Chinese American Transnationalism: The Flow of People, Resources, and Ideas between China and America during the Exclusion Era*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006, p.182.

⁵⁹ Chan, "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender," p.132-35.

American women often drew strength from the social movements in China. They were able to first claim the right to participate in the name of the public good and assume public identity through Chinese nationalism.

The biggest impact on the second-generation of Chinese American women was that they came of age during the decade when Modern Girls and New Women became a prominent phenomenon in the United States. The rising feminist consciousness within the U.S. accelerated the formation of a series of new manners and morals among women of bi-cultural background. To examine the freedoms gained by the second-generation of Chinese American women who resided in Chinatowns, the transformation of American society during the 1920s and 1930s should be considered as another influential historical context.

The period between the First World War and the Great Depression, witnessed a short phase of post-war prosperity which was marked by pervasive consumerism in the United States. As Dorothy Brown writes, “Historians have piled alliterative titles onto the Roaring Twenties: Fords, Flappers, and Fanatics, the Decade of the Dollar, the Period of the Psyche, the Time of Tremendous Trifles, Alcohol and Al Capone, and Dry Decade.”⁶⁰ At the same time, this decade was also an extraordinary period in American women’s history: the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920 recognized the legislation of women's suffrage throughout the country. It initiated a period of freedom and liberation that women had finally

⁶⁰ Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s*, Boston: Twayne, 1987, p.1.

become citizens with equal rights. Although “the newly won vote brought no immediate political victories,” as Alice Hessler-Harris’s observes, “it did provide a sense of freedom and of endless possibility.”⁶¹ To the American women, the 1920s had been a materially prosperous, spiritually emancipated, individualism promoting, and consumerism oriented era. Vice versa, the booming economy, rich culture, and stable society, were all related to the participation of women in public life. One cannot deny women’s importance in the transformation of the 1920s.

The 1920s also marked a decade of rapid industrialization and urbanization, which mobilized all Americans into the changing society, including the women. Out of domestic necessity, many married women joined the labor market and became breadwinners. Those who came from working class and immigrant families were the first group to seek jobs in this industrialization period. With opportunities for higher education and the mechanization of office work, middle-class women also began to secure white-collar jobs outside their home for the first time. The changing socioeconomic circumstances also reinforced women’s greater involvement in the public sphere. Since the 1920s, the modern girls were frequently portrayed in the cosmetics advertisements, embracing popular themes such as romancing in public, playing sports, posing as films stars,⁶² which represented their increasing public appearance. Despite political cultural backlash, the development of female

⁶¹ Alice Hessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-earning Women in the United States*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, p.224.

⁶² The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, “The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style,” p.25.

employment during the 1920s exerted tremendous influence on American society, on families and marriages, on women's own individuality. As they entered the workforce, gained skills, and earned money, many women experienced an awakening of self-consciousness, world outlook, and changing life style.

Generally, the women's liberation movement in the 1920s led to the appearance of a breed of New Women throughout America, who were often called "Flappers". In William and Mary Morris' *Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, they state, "In America, a flapper has always been a giddy, attractive and slightly unconventional young thing who, in Mencken's words, 'was a somewhat foolish girl, full of wild surmises and inclined to revolt against the precepts and admonitions of her elders.'"⁶³

As Bruce Bliven describes in "Flapper Jane":

"She is frankly, heavily made up... pallor mortis, poisonously scarlet lips, richly ringed eyes.... And there are, finally, her clothes.... Her dress... is cut low where it might be high, and vice versa. The skirt comes just an inch below her knees, overlapping by a faint fraction her rolled and twisted stockings. The idea is that when she walks in a bit of a breeze, you shall now and then observe the knee.... [The flapper's] haircut is also abbreviated. She wears of course the newest thing in bobs."⁶⁴

Signified by wearing short skirts, bobbed hair, and listening to jazz music, this group of women refreshed American society with their new characteristics. Contrary to the stereotype of the submissive and humble women, the New Women were often identified with rebellion images: smoking, drinking, dancing, etc. Moreover, they were also frequently found participating in leisure activities, such as playing golf,

⁶³ Quoted in Ralph K. Andrist, ed., *The American Heritage: History of the 20's & 30's*, New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1970, p.130.

⁶⁴ Bruce Bliven, "Flapper Jane," *New Republic*, September 9, 1925. Retrieved from <http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/1025/flapperjane.pdf>, May 29, 2012.

tennis, and swimming. No matter whether in appearance or in behavior, the New Women broke the restraints of Victorianism and advocated their equal rights with the men. Although criticized for the rebellious behavior, the generation of New Women also defended their own sexual mores. As is observed by Simmons, the late 1920s and 1930s witnessed an impetus to reform the Victorian marriage. While both men and women were potentially affected by the newly promoted practices such as free love and interracial relations, women benefited more from birth control, domestic equality and lesbian relationships.⁶⁵

The changing socioeconomic background played a significant role in creating the New Women. One of the noticeable factors was the improvement of women's education level. The first two decades of the 20th century witnessed a dramatically increased number of female students in higher education. Female enrollment increased by 1,000% in public colleges and by 482% in private schools.⁶⁶ The enrollment of women in colleges and universities had amounted to 431,000 persons, which was 43.7% of the total university population.⁶⁷ Moreover, women gained more personal freedom and financial autonomy through assuming independent occupations. In the 1920s, the New Women focused on office work, teaching, sales, and other white-collar jobs. In addition, the mass media, real estate industry, and financial sector, all provided plenty of opportunities for women. The increasing employment

⁶⁵ Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern*, p.80.

⁶⁶ William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman, Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1972, p.89.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Setting a Course*, p.248.

and income allowed the New Women to experience more equality with their men peers, both economically and morally. Historian Nancy Woloch points out that the flapper was also an economic symbol. “She was defined by the goods and services she was able to buy, whether silk stockings, bobbed hair, jazz records, or rouge compacts. Her attributes symbolized, at once, freedom, availability, and purchasing power.”⁶⁸

The modern girls were often portrayed in advertisements to encourage consumption. Part of this involved racial politics. The White American women demonstrated their possession of American modernity through consumption of racial masquerade: buying cosmetics that let them appear as Asians. They had the power to put on makeup to imitate the Asian girls and later take it off and remain white. On the one hand, these Modern Girls set an example for the second-generation Chinese American women to abandon the traditional moral order. However, the racial politics placed the Chinese American women in an inferior position compared to the white American women who were regarded as consumers. On the other hand, modern girls’ taste for westernized fashion, such as western short skirts and sleeveless shirts, was considered as politically dangerous during the 1930s in China,⁶⁹ when they were encouraged to dress appropriately and favor national products.

⁶⁸ Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American experience*, New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1984, p.401.

⁶⁹ Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Racial Masquerade: Consumption and Contestation of American Modernity,” p.131; Madeleine Y. Dong, “Who Is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?” p.216.

Popular culture was also a driving force that pushed the appearance of the New Women. The Hollywood films, radio shows, commercial advertisements, and other media wagged their tongues to advocate women's new lifestyles, such as free love and marriage, self-fulfillment in career, following fashion trends for emotional satisfaction, etc. According to the *News Republic* in 1922, "The flapper of fiction, plays, movies, and newspapers offers a vivid pattern of modern young life and creates a certain bravado... the necessity for living up to current opinion."⁷⁰ Endowed with new aesthetic trends and values, the New Women discarded their traditional gender roles at home to seek modern femininity.

Nevertheless, the 1920s also saw an antifeminist backlash in the United States. In reaction to the feminist movement, conservatives argued the problems of workplace discrimination and violence against women had been exaggerated, forcing women to assume employment out of their traditional roles would hurt them.⁷¹ Upon the coming of the Great Depression, the New Women found themselves unavoidably at the same position as their predecessors. Their new ideas and behaviors were no more than an updated cliché which suggested that "women's position is in the family." In regard to the excessive behaviors of the flapper, women's magazines such as the *Ladies' Home Journal* and the *McCall's* reiterated women's traditional roles as wives and mothers. *McCall's* reminded women that they could only "arrive at her true

⁷⁰ Quoted in Woloch, *Women and the American experience*, p.401.

⁷¹ See "Feminism – Overview – Antifeminism: The Backlash," Retrieved from <http://science.jrank.org/pages/9341/Feminism-Overview-Antifeminism-Backlash.html>, May 31, 2012.

eminence” in their role as wife and mother.⁷² The predicaments during the Great Depression period posed women in an even poorer situation and immobilized them, sending them back to their central role at home, maintaining marriage and family. In contrast to the previous decade, feminism was downplayed in the 1930s in the United States.

Corresponding to the women’s movement in the 1920s, the second-generation of Chinese American women who lived in the Chinese communities kept in pace with their peers who made assiduous efforts in the larger society. Just as Jane Kwong Lee witnessed, “the shy Chinese maidens in bound feet are forever gone, making place for active and intelligent young women.”⁷³ Along with the improved accessibility of higher education for American women, the second-generation of Chinese American women also gained equal opportunities for the same public education as Chinese boys. Although the pursuit of college education was still impossible due to racial discrimination, the institution of compulsory education guaranteed an equal number of high school graduates among both Chinese girls and boys.⁷⁴ The older generation of Chinese American women who were not able to make a presence in the public sector was succeeded by the younger generation. According to the Chin Cheung, an American born Chinese man, the second-generation of Chinese American girls were less appealing than the girls who were born in China, because they were “too

⁷² Quoted in Robert L Daniel, *American Women in the 20th Century: The Festival of Life*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987, p.87.

⁷³ Lee, “Chinese Women in San Francisco,” *Chinese Digest*, Vol. 4, No. 6, June, 1938, p.9.

⁷⁴ Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.126.

independent. [They] go out in the evening, dance, spend money, don't like stay home much."⁷⁵ Besides, many Chinese American girls found well-paid jobs in Chinatown. Their high school level education and bilingual ability led them to work as clerks and salespersons in local gift shops and businesses.⁷⁶ Influenced by women's liberation in China, Jane Kwong Lee observed Chinese women's change in the United States. "Chinese American women picked up the forward looking trend for equality with men. They could go to school, speak in public places, have their feet freed from binding, and go out to work in stores and small factories if they needed the work."⁷⁷ Benefiting from the feminist movement in the American society, the second-generation of Chinese American women were able to make a further step to assume employment in the public sphere.

The Second World War became a turning point for this generation of Chinese Americans, especially the women, which offered them a chance to be accepted by the American mainstream society through the opening of tremendous social and economic opportunities. For Chinese Americans, the Second World War doubled the war induced weight and stress they had to endure because many of them had directly or indirectly been touched by China's War of Resistance against Japan since the early 1930s. They were involved in the Sino-Japanese conflict at the first stage together with their Chinese compatriots. The war in China fueled the nationalist sentiments

⁷⁵ Quoted in Chan, "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender," p.150.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.139.

⁷⁷ Lee, "Chinese Women in San Francisco," p.8.

throughout Chinatowns, especially among those who had connections with China. In view of the plight in China, those America-born offspring, who were instilled with Chinese patriotism, were concerned with the social prospects in their motherland, especially its backwardness in education, technology, medical treatment, military service, etc. The economic opportunities in China attracted an estimated 20 percent of second-generation Chinese Americans to seek fortunes and establish themselves in China.⁷⁸ Many second generation women joined this crusade, such as Florence Chinn Kwan, Lilly King Gee Won, and Rose Hum Lee, making good use of their American education to serve China.⁷⁹ However, returning to China did not mean they were able to acculturate to the Chinese culture. When some of them came back to China, they found difficulty fitting into the land they had imagined.⁸⁰ Suspended between the implacable cultures, many American-born Chinese decided to stay in the Chinese American community where they could also demonstrate their patriotism to China.

On the whole, the Chinese American women who remained in the United States accounted for the large number. The statistics shows that an estimated 80% of the American-born Chinese stayed in the United States in the 1930s.⁸¹ To make a contribution in war mobilization and to improve their socioeconomic condition, some women entered the public sphere to seek employment. Some engaged in funding

⁷⁸ Gloria Heyung Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000, p.26.

⁷⁹ Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.160.

⁸⁰ Chan, "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender," p.158.

⁸¹ Chun, " 'Go West...to China': Chinese American Identity in the 1930s," p.174.

raising organizations to support the war in China. Newspapers in Chinatown also reported that young Chinese women organized American dances and musical events in the Chinese community to raise monies for the war effort.⁸² Aside from raising money, the second-generation of Chinese American women also engaged in a variety of particular careers, such as scientific research, medicine, aviation, etc. During the war period, the magazine *Independent Woman* published an article titled “Chinese Daughters of Uncle Sam” by Louise Purwin, which depicted lively the growing number of the America-born Chinese women assuming employment in the public sphere:

“American girls of Chinese ancestry are devoting their hands and their minds to an all-out victory effort. In aircraft plants, training camps, and hospital wards, at filter boards and bond booths, in shipyards, canteens, and Red Cross classes, these girls are doing their utmost to blend their new world education and their old-world talents to hasten the end of the war. Hundreds of Chinese girls, for centuries patient with their embroidery needles and skillful with their paint brushes, are “naturals” for delicate mechanical work in war plants, thus releasing warrior[s] to fight for Allied victory.”⁸³

It was the first time that a large number of the U.S.-born Chinese women were able to leave the restaurants, laundries, and grocery stores where their mothers had been confined, to establish themselves as eligible citizens and competent workers in American mainstream society. Breaking the racial restraints and cultural oppression, the second generation of Chinese American women articulated their own gender and ethnic identities through their active presence in the workplace during the wartime.

⁸² Quoted in Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.161.

⁸³ Quoted in Kevin Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.47.

Dr. Margaret Jessie Chung, known as the first American-born Chinese female physician, won much sympathy and generous contribution for purchasing medical supplies to send to the war zone, through which she demonstrated her distinct personality.⁸⁴ Their prominent achievements also helped to shape a positive image of Chinese Americans at the international front. Anna May Wong, the first Asian American film star in Hollywood, and Hazel Ying Lee, the pilot for the American Women Air-force Service during World War II, were two pioneer women among this generation. The next two chapters investigate their contributions to both the United States and China, which inspired a whole generation of young bi-cultural women of their time. Their ethnic and gender identities that represented this second-generation of Chinese American women will also be demonstrated in these two sections.

⁸⁴ P'ing Yu, "The Jade Box," *Chinese Digest*, Vol.3 No.10, October, 1937, p.12.

CHAPTER IV

ANNA MAY WONG

Introduction

Anna May Wong (1905-1961), known as the first Chinese American actress, secured her career in Hollywood with her debut in the film *The Red Lantern* (1919). Her commitment to motion pictures challenged the traditional Chinese notion of womanhood. Similar to the flappers' generation in the American mainstream society, rebellious behaviors were also observed in Chinese American adolescents,⁸⁵ among whom Anna May Wong was a typical "Chinese flapper." In addition to challenging the stereotype of the promising Chinese young woman, she also confronted racial ambivalence in both the United States and China, holding U.S. citizenship and having grown up with Chinese heritage. Thus, to attain public recognition as an actress while maintaining the Chinese values of a filial daughter at home, she had to balance between the constraints from both racial discrimination and familial pressure. This balance exerted pressure on her career and her compromised desire to both articulate her "oriental femininity for public consumption"⁸⁶ and Chinese ethnicity for self-identification.

Nevertheless, Anna May Wong's publicity and recognition on-screen during her active professional life illustrated her achievement as a modern professional woman

⁸⁵ Chan, "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender in the Construction of Identities among Second-Generation Chinese Americans," in Wong and Chan, *Claiming America*, 127-64.

⁸⁶ Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*, Berkeley, Calif. : University of California Press, 2005, p.57.

not only in the Chinese American community but also in American mainstream society. As Shirley Jennifer Lim remarks, Anna May Wong was the only woman of Chinese descent to attract the American public and media attention in the 1930s.⁸⁷ This chapter investigates the historical and cultural context which allowed Anna May Wong to claim a cinematic career. Departing from previous scholarship which more than often portrayed her stereotypical roles as having negatively shaped China's image abroad,⁸⁸ I examine her challenge to the patriarchal Chinese American community and negotiation of ethnic identity through her cinematic career as well as transnational travels and activities within the discourse of feminism, orientalism, and nationalism.

Bi-cultural Education: Articulating Gender and Ethnic Identity

Whether Anna May Wong belongs to the second-generation of Chinese American women is an unsettled question. A handful of documents recorded that she was born as the third generation of a Chinese American family in Los Angeles. Her father, Wong Sam Sing, was born in Sacramento, California as a second generation Chinese American but went back to China where he married for the first time in 1889.

⁸⁷ Shirley Jennifer Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960*, New York: New York University Press, 2005, p.82.

⁸⁸ Previous scholarship on Anna May Wong with a negative views, see Cynthia Liu, "When Dragon Ladies Die, Do They Come Back as Butterflies? Re-imagining Anna May Wong," in Darrell Hamamoto and Sandra Liu, eds., *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, pp.23-39; Shirley Jennifer Lim, "'I Protest': Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity," in Shirley Jennifer Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960*, New York: New York University Press, 2006, p.p.47-86; Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique : Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005; Graham Russell Hodges, *Anna May Wong: from Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Anthony B Chan, *Perpetually Cool: the Many Lives of Anna May Wong (1905-1961)*, Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003; Philip Leibfried, and Chei Mi Lane, *Anna May Wong: A Complete Guide to Her Film, Stage, Radio, and Television Work*, Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland, 2004.

Her mother, Oakland born Lee Gon Toy, married Wong Sam Sing in 1900 as his second wife.⁸⁹ However, according to Anna May Wong's earlier recollection of the Chinese exclusion period, her parents were both from China. In a 1924 interview, Anna May Wong stated that her father was born in China, while in the later interviews, she said that his birthplace was California but that he grew up in China and married before his return to the United States.⁹⁰ The inconsistencies show the possibility that Anna May Wong was one of the second-generation of Chinese Americans whose parent(s) were closely tied to China. "...whether her parents were American-born or not," notes Karen Leong, "Wong herself grew up among second-generation Chinese Americans and this clearly shaped her perception of what it meant to be Chinese American."⁹¹ Keeping a close relationship with his family in China, Wong Sam Sing belonged to a generation of Chinese men who deeply admired the Chinese traditional culture. The hostile atmosphere in the periphery of Los Angeles' Chinatown where the Wong family lived made him "feel far more Chinese than American."⁹²

Under the influence of her father who deeply adhered to Chinese customs, Anna May Wong's family was organized in a traditional way. Her mother Lee Gon Toy, like many other Chinese American women at that time, was confined to the domestic

⁸⁹ Quoted in Anthony B Chan, *Perpetually Cool: the Many Lives of Anna May Wong (1905-1961)*, Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003, p.13.

⁹⁰ Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.58.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

⁹² Graham Russell Hodges, *Anna May Wong: from Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p.7.

affairs within Chinatown and rarely interacted with Anglo-American society. In the later accounts of her childhood, Anna May Wong portrayed her father as a controlling and traditional man, who was “not so concerned over the health of his children as an American father” but “wish[ed] his children to be studious and obedient.”⁹³ Such a powerful father required his daughter to obey without questions and stick to her place at home. As she told in an interview:

“Chinese children are brought up with a great deal of discipline, a sense of responsibility, and a tremendous loyalty to each other. They may not be demonstrative and kiss each other, but a Chinese family will stick together through fire. White people often kiss each other a good deal, but desert each other in any kind of trouble.”⁹⁴

To her, kissing each other stood for a modern way to express one’s filial piety to his/her parents. Along with her attachment to the mainstream life in Los Angeles, the cultural split she encountered resulted in psychological ramifications which were later manifested in her film career.⁹⁵

Back in China, the New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s was initiated with the appeal to eliminate Confucianism and promote equality and freedom for women. Although the movement encouraged Chinese American women to reconsider their own gender and sexual identity, Chinese American men were reluctant to give up their privileges but insisted on Confucian principles by keeping women subordinate and children obedient. As a second-generation Chinese American girl, Anna May

⁹³ Anna May Wong, “The Childhood of a Chinese Screen Star,” *Picture Magazine*, September 1926, p.34.

⁹⁴ Betty Willis, “Famous Oriental Stars Return To The Screen,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, October 1941, p.44.

⁹⁵ Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, p.11-13.

Wong may not fully have understood the nuances of politics in China. But they existed in her memory as a part of Chinese American culture and contributed to her later determination to visit China in 1936. Hollywood's earlier depiction of China through immoral gendered image had been complained by Chinese officials, as many Nationalists sought to legitimize the new and modern China through the representation of Chinese women.⁹⁶ Cynthia Enloe noted that "many communities aimed to affirm their national stature assign 'ideological weight' to women's clothing, behavior, and sexuality, precisely because women are viewed as possessions of community, transmitters of culture, and mothers of the nation."⁹⁷ To the Chinese politicians, Anna May Wong's presence as a half-dressed Mongol slave in *The Thief of Bagdad* was low caste, which perpetuated a negative stereotype of Chinese women and damaged China's international reputation.

Education also played an important part in shaping Anna May Wong's gender and ethical values, which shifted her from her mother's generation. The Chinese American children grew up in a culturally divided world, where the English schools prepared them for life in a Western-dominated world they could only partly enter, while the Chinese schools gave them the language and cultural skills needed for Chinatown jobs – the only ones they could get.⁹⁸ Initially, Anna May Wong and her older sister Lulu attended the California Street School, where they experienced

⁹⁶ Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.74.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.74.

⁹⁸ Pan, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, p.118.

unpleasant treatment resulting from Anglo-American racism. Aware of the hostility his daughters had suffered, Wong Sam Sing told them “to be proud of their people and race,”⁹⁹ and transferred them to the Presbyterian Chinese Mission School which was located in Chinatown. To Anna May Wong, this place not only provided her a feeling of safety, but also offered her a heavy dose of Christian values. “Here though our teachers were American, all our schoolmates were Chinese. We were among our own people. We were not tormented any longer.”¹⁰⁰ Wong realized that attending public school was changing her both physically and psychologically. She recalled how she realized the departure from Chinese traditions: “Outside of our own home, we were thoroughly American in dress, action, speech and thought. Right and left we were smashing the traditions of our forebears.... What was America doing to me, that at so early an age I shared a marked tendency to forget all my parents’ teachings? There is no question I was changing rapidly.”¹⁰¹ Besides, Anna May Wong’s school activities, such as playing marbles with little boys, and refusing to attend the school’s sewing circle, had disappointed the traditional expectations for young women of Chinese ethnicity her parents had for her. No wonder that her later pursuit of a film career was a surprising confrontation with her parents and even the whole Chinese American community.

⁹⁹ Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.14.

¹⁰⁰ Anna May Wong, “The True Life Story of a Chinese Girl,” *Pictures Magazine*, August 1926, p.108.

¹⁰¹ Wong, “The Childhood of a Chinese Screen Star,” p.34.

Wong Sam Sing was displeased with his daughters' insufficient attachment to their Chinese heritage. In response, he sent them to a Chinese-language school during afternoons and Saturdays as "a strategy used by many Chinese parents to maintain their homeland culture" and had them "learn to speak, read, and write Chinese."¹⁰² The Chinese school helped to nurture nationalist sentiments, and thus countering somewhat Americanization of the younger generation of Chinese children.¹⁰³ However, Wong found that the school days were troubled. She recollected, "It's quite a strain on a growing child to go to school ten hours a day, with no recreation, even without any supper at night except a bowl of noodles bought for five cents at a neighboring chop-suey house."¹⁰⁴ In response, she used to play hookey from school to watch motion pictures, which inspired her more than textbooks. On the other hand, the laundry business of the Wong family was also a vital factor that affected Wong's career choice. As she grew older, she was required to help in the family-owned laundry, where the entire family worked. Fortunately, it provided her "more freedom of movement than was otherwise allowed most Chinese American daughters, who were expected to remain within the home."¹⁰⁵ During the part-time job, she learned basic business principles and other skills such as how to communicate with people, especially the non-Asian Americans she met when delivering fresh laundry. Thus, she

¹⁰² Yung, *Unbound Feet*, p.35.

¹⁰³ Pan, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, p.265.

¹⁰⁴ Wong, "The Childhood of a Chinese Screen Star," p.72.

¹⁰⁵ Sucheta Mazumdar, "In the Family," in Lucie Cheng; University of California, Los Angeles, Asian American Studies Center; Chinese Historical Society of Southern California; et al, *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles*, Los Angeles, Calif.: The Society, 1984, p.37.

became more acclimatized to westerners than many of her female peers who were confined in Chinatown.¹⁰⁶

Without any uneasy conscience, Anna May Wong associated her fascination with movies and regarded playing hookey as a manifestation of her Americanization which she took for granted. “I was learning to think and act for myself. It is this trait of independence which sets me apart, perhaps more than anything else, from other Chinese girls, most of whom obey their parents blindly all their lives.”¹⁰⁷ Motivated by the Hollywood actresses who showed the most persuasive flapper images, Wong found her future to be a modern girl who embodied western fashion, modernity, and independence, which was different from her imagined Chinese girl image. As a result, Anna May Wong made up her mind to become an actress, which was never considered as a potential career for a girl of the second-generation of Chinese Americans. Conservative as Wong Sam Sing was, he firmly upheld the Chinese tradition that “a good man will not be a soldier, and a good girl will not be an actress.”¹⁰⁸ Her superstitious mother even perceived acting as offensive behavior, “Anna May, I wish you would not have so many photographs taken. Eventually you may lose your soul.”¹⁰⁹ Not to mention the anti-China themes which were extensively embraced in Hollywood cinema during that time. Domestic conflict and her

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Wong, “The Childhood of a Chinese Screen Star,” p.72.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.25.

¹⁰⁹ Wong, “The Childhood of a Chinese Screen Star,” p.74.

Americanized identity pushed her into a predicament, which was also revealed in her film career later. Her father's disapproval did not stop Anna May Wong from chasing her dream. She welcomed her first opportunity in 1919, when the Metro Pictures Company was filming *The Red Lantern*. Although the debut was shown as one of the many extras, Wong was the first Chinese American who found in Hollywood a niche to realize her fantasies about a particular future which was different from her parents' expectation. The films not only established a corridor for her to acculturate into the American society both physically and mentally, but also allowed her to negotiate nationalism, orientalism, and sexism on the new stage.

The Early Career: Negotiating Orientalism and Sexism

Wong's film career was a mirror which reflected the dynamic relationships between the United States' and China, and thus resulted in changing portrayals of China. Although her portrayal of an Asian image fulfilled the white audience's fantasies about the Orient, she made efforts to counteract the racial and gender ambiguity in a search for her own identity and femininity. Her negotiations of the transformation from an identity as "the other" under American orientalism to the self-identified Chinese American ethnicity contributed to a rising consciousness of transnational identity in her generation of Chinese Americans. Her increasing involvement with American popular culture as an ethnic American woman not only invited the second-generation of Chinese American women to reconsider their gender roles, but also improved the reputation of Chinese Americans to some extent. Given

her immense popularity as a film star and her function as a role model as testified by previous discussion, it is likely that Anna May Wong's contribution to China and the United States during the Second World War encouraged her generation of Chinese American women to engage in the public sphere and claim their individual value.

To Anna May Wong, the early participation in Hollywood was limited to the productions with an Asian theme. "Hollywood's rigid racial casting, which exists to the present, had boxed her into a limited number of roles."¹¹⁰ Her film career emerged during a xenophobic period when the orientalism was largely embraced in the Asia oriented cinemas and was warmly welcomed by the American White audiences. The term orientalism, as Edward Said argues, refers to Europe's long-standing fascination and engagement with the Orient. In the United States, which inherited the legacy of European orientalism, World War II induced an orientation towards the Asia-Pacific. The resulting cultural projections visible in Asia focused cinematic productions were tainted by orientalism and cultural hegemony. Apart from the dominant cultural identity as "self," white Anglo-Americans established a construction of identity within which the Asian ethnicity was defined as "other." Like other second-generation Chinese American females who asserted their U.S. identity through popular culture, Wong was captured with ethnic otherness due to her exotic ethnic status. Since the U.S. film industry had a preference to "portray Asian people

¹¹⁰ Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.24.

and their culture as the inferior yet desirable antithesis to the West,”¹¹¹ Anna May Wong’s career was mostly defined as cinematic Orientalism through her stereotypical and insulting roles of Asian women.

In 1924, Wong played a Mongol slave in Douglas Fairbanks motion picture *The Thief of Bagdad*, which was her first appearance that brought her national prominence. However, her role as a “Dragon Lady” displayed an evil and seductive image of an Asian woman. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Fairbanks confided that he had to write a letter to Wong’s parents “before she would agree to put on the Mongol slave costume, which as you will see, is not much of a job, seeing that Mongol slaves are merely attired for comfort.”¹¹² Nevertheless, the amorality associated with her onscreen characters was not a demonstration of “self-Orientalization.”¹¹³ Reflecting orientalist perceptions indicated that Anna May Wong could not be both Chinese and American at the same time: her earlier career in Hollywood suggested she was becoming less Chinese and assimilating as an American.¹¹⁴ The representation of Asian characters played a key role in cultivating Wong’s Chinese American identity, meanwhile reshaped her interpretation femininity and sexuality in both American and Oriental contexts. On the one hand, she permitted the extraordinarily long finger-nails to grow on her slim hands as the highest feminine

¹¹¹ Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-haired Bastards: the Life of a Wartime Celebrity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, p.81.

¹¹² Garland Richard Kyle, “The Legend of Anna May Wong,” *Gum Saan Journal*, Vol.2, No.2, December 1988, p.9.

¹¹³ Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors*; and Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹¹⁴ Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.77.

caste of Chinese custom while also an expression of the flapperism. On the other hand, she cultivated her distinct perspective about race and marriage with a consideration of the cultural conflict and ethnic boundary between her Chinese ethnicity and American education:

“I don’t suppose I’ll ever marry. Whom could I marry? Not a man of your race, for he would lose caste among his people and I among mine. And so far, I have never found a Chinese man whom I could love. With us, the woman is slave, the man master. I’ve been educated as American girls are. My work has fostered independence in me. I couldn’t live as my mother always has, under the domination of my father. I don’t believe that woman is an inferior creature. How can I?”¹¹⁵

In this article, Helen Carlisle’s description of Anna May Wong as confident woman who exceeded her people highlighted Wong’s privileged yet Oriental status, which mirrored the prohibition of interracial marriage in the White society. Moreover, Anna May Wong’s public image as a single woman projected a gendered difference between Chinese and American culture.

Anna May Wong’s dilemma between her American and Chinese backgrounds formed the basis of her personality as a Hollywood celebrity. She publicized her private life to convince film producers and even audiences of the characters she could portray.¹¹⁶ According to Leong’s interpretation, the similarities between Wong’s celebrity personality and the film characters were frequently captured in movie magazines: “Articles about film personalities promised their readers a glimpse into the real life of celebrity and a virtual relationship with particular actors inside and

¹¹⁵ Helen Carlisle, “Velly Muchee Longly: Anna May Wong’s Heart is Divided Between East and West – So Romance Passes Her By,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, Vol.35, No.2, March 1928, p.94.

¹¹⁶ Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.69.

outside the movie theater.”¹¹⁷ Aside from romances, this interview also featured

Wong’s “divided heart” regarding to her bi-cultural background:

“The last year [1927] has seen her withdrawing more and more within herself, calling back the customs, speech and manner of her own people. Yet her heart is divided between Occident and Orient; and through her strange beauty, her gentle personality, her recognized talent as an artist [who] have won her a definite place in the professional and social world of Hollywood, it is a place apart.”¹¹⁸

Discussions of the culture conflicts in her real life established a divergence of Chinese and American identity not only for Wong herself but also for the magazine readers.

On the one hand, readers might partly identify with her inclination to Chinese culture.

On the other hand, the readers could hardly recognize the difficulty to choose between race and nationality. “In 1930, Wong protested what she felt to be an incorrect interpretation of Asian women’s proper gait.”¹¹⁹ It was a combination of the on-screen experience and off-screen life that allowed Wong to perform self-transformation upon the new international background in the decades of wartime.

The Sino-Japanese War: Self-transformation

During the 1930s, the new historical circumstances opened a new context for Anna May Wong to present a changing role of Chinese on the screen. “Orientals” were portrayed on the screen. The Sino-Japanese War in 1931 aroused great sympathy for China and Chinese Americans while the hostility shifted towards Japan and Japanese living in the United States. The amelioration of U.S.-China relations resulted

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.70.

¹¹⁸ Carlisle, “Velly Muchee Longly,” p.41.

¹¹⁹ Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging*, p.57.

in a positive racial portrayal of Chinese. “In films, Chinese and Chinese Americans gained an identity distinct from that of the Japanese” since China was regarded as “a good ally” and “Orientals became ethnicity-specific.”¹²⁰ To the Chinese Americans, their loyalty to China was considered as a reinforcement of their American patriotism. As a result, “the Chinese were culturally created as the ‘good’ ethnicity.”¹²¹ The rising status of China in the international front became an advantage for Wong’ to deploy better portrayals of Chinese image. Throughout the 1930s Anna May Wong used the public interviews to counter the assumptions about her stereotypical roles for Chinese women in Hollywood. She told to reporters before her trip to England in 1933: “After going through so many experiences of roles that don’t appeal to me, I have come to the point of finding it all pretty futile to repeat poor things. I feel that by now I have earned the right to have a little choice in the parts I play.”¹²² She also announced that she “would never play again in a film which showed the Chinese in an unsympathetic light.”¹²³

Wong’s appearance in the movies embraced a “New Woman” image, “signifying modern sexuality in the service of heroism.”¹²⁴ In contrast to the poor, disreputable Chinese women she had portrayed in the past decade, she found her significant stardom by playing “upper-class, sexually respectable Chinese American women” in

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.61.

¹²¹ Ibid., p.74.

¹²² Quoted in Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.82.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging*, p.69.

the 1930s.¹²⁵ In *Daughters of Shanghai* (1937), as a heroine, Wong was featured as an accomplished, independent, and modern Chinese American woman. The same presence was also revealed in *King of Chinatown* (1939), in which she was portrayed as a Chinese American physician, Dr. Mary Ling, who was proud of her Chinese heritage. In the film, she helped to raise funding for Chinese victims during the war, which prepared her enthusiasm for fund-raising during the Second World War in reality. The opportunities for ethnic non-white women in the United States allowed Wong to negotiate between the Chinese and American identities. The rising nationalism in China played an important role in her reluctance the stereotypical roles of Chinese women in Hollywood, and reinforced her understanding of how to articulate Chinese American identity. As a matter of fact, her on-screen roles which used to establish the superiority of whiteness and mainstream cultural hegemony under the influence of American orientalism then yielded to her inclination to cultivate a sense of Chinese-ness through negotiation of racial and gender identities. In 1937, Anna May Wong appeared on the cover of the second issue of *Look Magazine*, which was a popular magazine with an emphasis on photographs, being identified as the “World's Most Beautiful Chinese Girl.” the *Look Magazine*’s feature also awarded Anna May Wong as “the icon of modern hybrid Chinese American cultural citizenship.”¹²⁶ The fame came simultaneously with her participation in the activities to raise awareness and funds for China relief during the wartime. Wong’s

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.85.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.77.

public presence thus perpetuated an aesthetic that gradually shaped American orientalism to a rising sympathy for a new China.

As for the foreign-born Chinese artists who were distanced from their ancestral culture both by space and by time, awareness of cultural displacement has impelled them to undertake a psychological, if not physical, journey to recover their “lost” heritage.¹²⁷ As for Anna May Wong, the trip to China in 1936 was a significant accomplishment in her life. For many second-generation of Chinese Americans, China, as their ancestral country, holds more curiosity than emotional connection. Her ambivalent attitude before the visit, “strange country, and, yet, in a way, I am going home,” conveyed her hesitation to claim her identity between the American nationality and her Chinese heritage. She stated that “she was fulfilling a lifelong dream of visiting China and planned to learn its language and culture.”¹²⁸ In 1936, the Republic of China witnessed tremendous social changes and political tensions under the control of the Guomindang, which “provide[d] the catalyst for Wong’s personal and spiritual awakening.”¹²⁹ However, on her visit she found a hostile climate because of her early portrayal of disgraced Chinese females. Wong publicly explained her early indecent roles as a compromise with career development. She made efforts to notify the audiences that her role also spoke of the ways in which she

¹²⁷ Pan, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, p.128.

¹²⁸ Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.158.

¹²⁹ Chan, *Perpetually Cool*, p.92.

tried to emphasize to audiences that her character did not represent China and Chinese people.¹³⁰

Besides, Wong's embodiment of modern femininity was not in tune with the approved gender, moral, and sexual values in China. Spokesmen for the Guomindang government urged young women to accept the Confucian "four virtues" by claiming "a modest political position and withdraw(ing) from public gatherings."¹³¹ Wong's erotic presentation on the screen challenged the conservative aesthetics of Chinese cinema and provoked political risk for her. The New Life Movement in 1934 was at its peak of policing women's fashion, when Chinese women were required to abide by the dress codes on the length of dress, jacket, and skirt, and to abandon fashions.¹³² Contrary to Anna May Wong's sleeveless tops and short skirts, the Chinese movies stars like Hu Die were mobilized to wear dresses with Chinese element, such as *qipao* and long gowns. Nevertheless, considering her global reputation, Wong's representations of independent career women both in the films and in real life seemed to be influential in inspiring the awareness of femininity and sexuality in Chinese cinema during the 1930s.

After she left China in the same year, she found that the gifts the trip bestowed on her were more clearly perceived ethnicity, nationality, and gender identity. She said, "Though I am American born of American born parents, I am a full-blooded Chinese

¹³⁰ Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.165.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.160.

¹³² Quoted in Madeleine Yue Dong, "Who Is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl," p.216.

and more Chinese than ever. When I returned from my first visit to China I found here an even more restless seeking for something that couldn't be found."¹³³ However, she admitted that during the days in the small town where her father lived she was "homesick for America," even her father found that the hometown was "jarringly unfamiliar."¹³⁴ The unexpected confrontations she experienced in China revealed that the homeland she had imagined was an emotional and psychological comfort, which offered an alternative to counter the marginalized status of Chinese Americans in the United States. Through transnational traveling, she discovered that she could no longer identify herself as American or Chinese, but rather a Chinese American identity which represented the American-born Chinese of her generation.

Since the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937) and America's later participation in World War II, Wong shifted her focus from cinematic performance to actual contribution such as fund-raising to support China. She spent much of her time participating in Red Cross and China Relief activities. In June 1938, she donated her collection of gowns in an auction and sent money and medical supplies to China.¹³⁵ In a China Relief sponsored auction, Anna May Wong showed her movie that had been shot during her visit to China in 1936, after which she deposited the proceeds in a China bank fund to help Chinese war refugees.¹³⁶ At the same time, she undertook

¹³³ Ibid., p.182.

¹³⁴ Leong, *The China Mystique*, p.91.

¹³⁵ Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.197.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.197.

the direction of the motion-pictures division of the Bowl of Rice drive, to help provide medical aid to China and the China Aid Council.¹³⁷ Anna May Wong's endeavors, together with those of other second-generation Chinese American women, to articulate their patriotism both to China and to the United States turned out successful. The Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943 allowed a national quota of 105 Chinese immigrants per year under the favoring China atmosphere. Wong's wartime experiences were different from most other Chinese American women, who served in the military, factories, or other American frontiers. "Ordinary women established a working class solidarity, while Anna May's allure was based on Hollywood and its transient loyalties."¹³⁸ However, her negotiation with ethnic and gender identities became a political and cultural asset during the Sino-Japanese War and the Second World War. Newspapers such as *The Chinese Digest* and *Los Angeles Times* frequently referred to Anna May Wong as a voice for China and Chinatown.

Conclusion

Anna May Wong's effort to establish her cinematic career in the United States reflected the shifting racial, gender, and sexual boundaries in the Chinese American community and the broader society before and during World War II. Her life and career showed us how Chinese American identity was shaped and established upon the integration of hybrid Chinese American practices (Chinese cultural heritage and American acculturation), American Orientalism, and Chinese ethnicity. The

¹³⁷ Hodges, *Anna May Wong*, p.200.

¹³⁸ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese Americans*, pp.48-78.

integration of her Chinese American identity and Wong's popularity among the U.S. mainstream society demonstrated the transition of Chinatown to a modern community in which the social hierarchies and practices were reconfigured. To her audience, including the mainstream white audiences and those from Chinatown, Wong's political adventurousness and cultural resistance crossed the boundaries between white and nonwhite, male and female. In this process, female professionalization was extensively distributed among the second-generation of Chinese American women and gradually accepted by the older generation. In many ways, Anna May Wong's story symbolized the second-generation of Chinese American women during the 1930s and 1940s. Until World War II and the postwar period, the American-born women of Chinese ancestry reinforced their self-identification of racial and gender roles in the public sphere where their daily activities were expanded.

CHAPTER V

HAZEL YING LEE

Introduction

Hazel Ying Lee (1912 – 1944), known as a pioneer aviator, was the first Chinese American woman to fly for the United States military and also the last U.S. woman pilot to die in a military plane in World War II. However, her name was hardly remembered after her death for almost 50 years, nor was her achievement as a female pilot who served for the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) honored by American society. This chapter looks into Hazel Ying Lee's career and contribution in World War II as an original case study. Being a second-generation of Chinese American woman, Lee encountered less racism during her military service when China was regarded as a good ally with the United States. However, the difficulty she experienced to establish her aviation career revealed the gender bias in the United States, which transcended the influence of Confucian morals and order in Chinese women's lives. This chapter argues that on the construction of her gender identity through the discourse of nationalism, Hazel Ying Lee established feminine power in the nationalist project to challenge the masculine order.

Militarized Participation of Women in WWII

The Chinese American community was isolated for decades due to the ubiquitous racial discrimination. The Second World War provided an opportunity for Chinese

Americans to break through the restrictions of the Exclusion Act and unite with the other U.S. citizens to build up the national defense through participation in the war effort. Wartime employment had also endowed many Chinese Americans with considerable benefits. Joining in defense work enabled the Chinese Americans to apply for government-subsidized housing, which allowed them rare opportunities to move out of Chinatowns.¹³⁹ Inspired by their patriotic sentiment as well as the favorable treatments, thousands of Chinese American men and women answered the government's call to assume wartime employment, which "would forever change their own lives as well as the development of the community."¹⁴⁰

As has been demonstrated in the second chapter, Chinese women's public roles were limited compared to their male peers in the Chinese community. Boundaries were also found in the community organizations and activities in which women had less power and rights even during wartime. Major decisions were made by men, while women mostly engaged in social gatherings, fund-raising, and Red Cross work.¹⁴¹ Following this logic, Chinese American men took conscription as their privilege, while Chinese American women were rejected from the army or related defense workplaces. There are few accounts in the Chinese community press that deal with the issue of women's wartime employment in the defense industry. "It is the servicemen who will do the fighting for us," chairman of the American Women's Voluntary

¹³⁹ Quoted in Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.55.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Hua Liang, "Fighting for a New Life: Social and Patriotic Activism of Chinese American Women in New York City, 1900-1945," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol.17, No.2, Winter 1998, pp.22-38.

Service, C.T. Feng, told Chinese American women. “We must show our fighting men that we are absolutely behind them.”¹⁴²

In face of the war, women were regarded as the vulnerable group who should be protected rather than protect others. As Sinha points out, “The rhetoric of the protection of women as well as the protection of the nation – itself often represented as a woman – was thus an important component in the production of masculinity.”¹⁴³ Wartime masculinity within the discourse of nationalism legitimized Chinese American women’s responsibility such as “giving their families the right nutritional food” via the control and protection of women.¹⁴⁴ Historically, the military is perceived as a masculine arena, from which women were either excluded or in which they played traditional roles such as provisioning, cooking, and nursing for the soldiers. In many cases, men gained political rights through their eligibility to shed blood for the nation.¹⁴⁵ As a result, nationalist projects such as World War II were constructed upon the dominant masculinity while femininity was downplayed in the context of “gendered war rhetoric.”

However, the gender restriction did not stop the second-generation of Chinese American women to express their expectations for defense work and military service. As can be seen from the statistics, Chinese American women were among the

¹⁴² Quoted in Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.70.

¹⁴³ Mrinalini Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” p.257.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.70.

¹⁴⁵ Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” p.256.

approximately 250,000 women and 12,000 Chinese Americans who served in the armed forces during World War II.¹⁴⁶ Besides the jobs they could assume, many Chinese American women volunteered for the war effort on the home front, participated in dances, cultural programs, parades, raffles, and drives to sell war bonds in Chinese American community to raise money for the war.¹⁴⁷ Together with their male peers, the American-born Chinese women also showed enthusiastic support for their homeland. Meanwhile, independent as they were, they were eager to prove that they could handle more than feminine jobs. In this view, women's contributions to the nationalist struggle were at least as significant, if not more than, the men's.¹⁴⁸ The Sino-Japanese war raised unprecedented nationalism not only in China but also in the Chinese American community, hence creating a space for the empowerment of women to establish their careers in military service as well as other industries. In face of the war, Madame Chiang Kai-shek made a nationwide call to the Chinese women, "I think that the greatest contribution we can make is our strength and determination to make any and all sacrifices for the preservation of the nation."¹⁴⁹

Since the early decades of the 20th century, the Chinese American community made efforts to build military power for the sake of constructing a strong China. Chinese Americans trained a significant number of men and women for the shortage

¹⁴⁶ Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, p.67.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.66-67.

¹⁴⁸ Sinha, "Gender and Nation," p.241.

¹⁴⁹ May-ling Soong Chiang, *This Is Our China*, New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1940, p.206.

of workers in the military service and defense industry in China during World War II and sent them back to China. According to Him Mark Lai, the idea of “National Salvation through Aviation” was advocated by the Guomindang government and was greatly embraced within the Chinese American community during the 1920s. Following the appearance of several aviation clubs in the postwar period, training pilots for the Chinese Air Force became one the major concerns of the Chinese Americans, especially after Japanese military forces occupied Manchuria in the early 1930s. Several Chinese American aviation schools and clubs were established throughout the United States through the financial support of community members, and some accepted female trainees.¹⁵⁰ Through years of training, a large number of the volunteers applied to go to China for airforce service during the Sino-Japanese War.¹⁵¹

It was the attack on Pearl Harbor (December, 1941) that officially brought China and the United States together against the Japanese military. The war aroused U.S. nationalism in a day and fundamentally changed people’s lives. To the Chinese Americans, the bombing of Pearl Harbor attenuated the racial prejudice, and increased the anti-Japanese sentiment which helped break the isolated situation of their community. “It is fortunate,” said an editorial in the *Chinese Times*, “that this war has

¹⁵⁰ Him Mark Lai, *Cong Huaqiao dao Huaren: Ershi Shiji Meiguo Huaren Shehui Fazhanshi* [From Overseas Chinese to Ethnic Chinese: A History of the Social Development of Chinese American in the 20th Century], Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1992, pp.320-27.

¹⁵¹ Him Mark Lai, “Roles Played by Chinese in American During China’s Resistance to Japanese Aggression During World War II,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1997, pp.79-81.

the white race and the yellow race on both sides and therefore will not turn into a war between the two.”¹⁵² Women of all colors were called to serve in different branches of the military during the war. In the following year, the growing shortage of wartime manpower led to the rethinking of women’s positions, whether should be away from the warfront or the male domain.¹⁵³ Approximately 350,000 would serve in the newly created female units of the armed forces.¹⁵⁴ A large number of the second-generation of Chinese American women, especially those who were not married and had less household responsibility, were enlisted in the army together with men to protect their country.

In contrast to their previously marginalized status away from the public domain, Chinese women played a significant role in the maintenance of their community as well as the maintenance of their national identity through their participation in World War II. “The scale of wartime changes created unprecedented opportunities to transform the racial and gender contours of American society.”¹⁵⁵ Besides their presence in fund-raising and Red Cross work, the second-generation of Chinese American women were also found in the military. The contour of patriotic femininity, in this way, was produced through the self-conscious rejection of gender bias in the masculine society. Moreover, the constructions of gender roles and femininity were

¹⁵² Quoted in Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.54.

¹⁵³ Marianne Verges, *On Silver Wings: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1991, p.28.

¹⁵⁴ Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-haired Bastards*, p.136.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

closely related to the establishment of national and cultural identity, which held significant implications for Chinese American women's experience of wartime contribution.

Military Career of Hazel Ying Lee

Hazel Ying Lee grew up with her parents, Yuet Lee and Ssiu Lan Lee, and eight brothers and sisters in the Chinatown in Portland, Oregon. Yuet Lee fled from China in the early 20th century when the domestic struggle between the Nationalist government and the Communists began. He settled in Oregon, married Ssiu Lan Lee, a Chinese immigrant woman, and raised a Chinese American family. As a merchant, Yuet Lee went into partnerships with the Golden Pheasant restaurant and the Bamboo Inn in Portland's Chinatown. In a traditional Chinese family, the restaurant business was run by the entire family.¹⁵⁶ "We all lived tight in this walkup apartment," Hazel Ying's sister Frances Tong recalled in an interview, "Then there was an import-export business," Frances continued, "Mah-Jong cards and baskets; things from China."¹⁵⁷

For Hazel Ying's parents who had close connections to their mother-land, keeping Chinese traditions, customs, and languages were of primary concern in maintaining their family. It is the "inability to detach themselves from their racial origin which prompts the Chinese in this country to establish Chinese schools for the education of their children in their own language and culture."¹⁵⁸ From the records of

¹⁵⁶ Kay Gott, WASP, *Hazel Ah Ying Lee: Women AirForce Service Pilot, World War II: A Portrait*, McKinleyville, CA: Selbstverl, 1996, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ Margie Boule, "Hazel Ying Lee's Aerial Odyssey Wins Its Wings At Long Last," *Oregonian*, April 3, 2003, p.1.

¹⁵⁸ Ethel Lum, "Chinese Language Schools in Chinatown," *Chinese Digest*, February 7, 1936, p.10.

Chinese languages school in the Chinese American community, most second-generation Chinese American children, including the girls, were required by their parents to go to special Chinese classes after attending American public school. The Chinese education contributed to Hazel Ying's proficiency in reading, writing and speaking Chinese, which further fostered her interest in Chinese culture and her inclination to a Chinese identity. On the other hand, in China daughters were considered inferior to sons, and so were the female offspring of Chinese American immigrants. Most Chinese immigrants were more willing to give financial support to their sons than daughters because they expected to live with their sons and grandchildren in the future.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the second-generation of Chinese American girls received more attention than their sisters in China because of their minimal presence in numbers in the United States. At least, they were liberated from foot-binding, which at the time was still practiced in China for middle and upper-class women.

When Hazel Ying graduated from high school in 1930, the Anti-Chinese sentiment was strong in Portland. Fed up with the only job she could do as an elevator girl, Hazel Ying accepted an offer of a ride in a friend's airplane in 1931.¹⁶⁰ Her enthusiasm for flying inspired her to develop her career as a female pilot. She joined the Portland Flying Club immediately where only two girls participated. Hazel Ying was among the first thirty-two graduates in Portland's Chinese Aeronautical School in

¹⁵⁹ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.70.

¹⁶⁰ Boule, "Hazel Ying Lee's Aerial Odyssey Wins Its Wings At Long Last," p.1.

1932 where she earned her pilot's license. "It so happened that Hazel got her pilot's license right after the passing of our father. If dad had still been there, I don't think she would have been able to get it," Frances Tong said as she recollected her sister's flight lessons in 1932. "But she knew that's what she wanted to do. She didn't care if it was ladylike or not."¹⁶¹ Culturally trained as her mother was, she was not as keen about the contribution to the Chinese Air Force as Hazel Ying. However, she later compromised with her daughter's adventurous spirit. It was both a change and a shock to Chinese traditions to have a daughter who enrolled for flying.¹⁶²

In the context of the U.S. air-force, women pilots were treated with suspicion. The Portland *Oregonian* reported that "few of the instructors were sympathetic to women, fearing the women would go 'haywire' on the solo flight. This type of instructor is not encouraging, quite the contrary; if the student solos, much depends on her own efforts and determination."¹⁶³ Compared to their male counterparts who had a wider range of professional opportunities, the airwomen had to rely more heavily on performance to attain recognition.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, to Hazel Ying, flying was not a male privilege. Together with another second-generation Chinese American girl named Virginia Wong, Hazel Ying went through the same procedures as the boys and passed all the flight tests in 1932.

¹⁶¹ Gillian Flaccus, "Chinese American WASP Losing Her Anonymity," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 2003.

¹⁶² Gott, *Hazel Ah Ying Lee*, p.2.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁶⁴ Dean Jaros, *Heroes Without Legacy: American Airwomen, 1912-1944*, Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1993, p.67.

It was during the same year that Japan's invasion into China encouraged a group of Chinese American men to leave the United States to fight against the Japanese in the Chinese Airforce. Almost immediately, Hazel Ying flew to China and volunteered to serve in the Chinese Air Force. Her support of China's war in against Japan became an indication of her loyalty to both China and the United States. Most of her male classmates were accepted into the Chinese military, but Hazel Ying was turned down because the Chinese military couldn't bring themselves to accept a woman pilot despite a daily aerial onslaught by the Japanese.¹⁶⁵ She could only take a desk job with the Chinese military and fly very occasionally for a commercial company operating out of Nanjing. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident (1937) in China marked the official beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, when Japanese troops marched south from Manchuria. Hazel Ying went to Canton to teach in the village where her father's clan resided. There she witnessed Japanese bombs and bullets which killed numerous civilians in the city.

As a second-generation of Chinese American woman, life in China, especially the traditional female role, was not easy for Hazel Ying Lee. She constantly had head-on collisions with the culture and her father's family, as she told her colleague later in WASP, "They couldn't seem to catch on to an American girl at all!"¹⁶⁶ When Hazel Ying Lee and Anna May Wong called themselves American girl, they regarded it as a synonym of Modern Girl and New Women, which meant the freedom not to observe

¹⁶⁵ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, p.106.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.197.

Chinese moral order – girls were inferior to their brothers at home and should accepted arranged marriage. The rigid social structure in China made Lee realize that she could not identify herself as Chinese, nor would she commit to a purely American identity. The traveling experience in China invited her to reconsider her ethnicity and femininity amid the wartime nationalist imagination. In addition, rather than compromising with the role of traditional women, Hazel Ying represented the kind of “‘modern-yet-modest’ women who both symbolized the nation and negotiated its tension between the traditional and the modern.”¹⁶⁷ She felt the call to professionally contribute to both nations, the United States and China, but was denied permission to defend China in the air. As a U.S. citizen who dwelled in Chinese American community, traveled between China and the United States, and contributed to the World War II in the United States under the call of Chinese nationalism, the nation she contributed to was extended beyond either the geographical state where she lived or the cultural state as a concept in her mind.

Denied permission to defend China in the air, Hazel Ying soon returned to the United States and went to work in New York City.¹⁶⁸ In the fall of 1942, she heard that Jacqueline Cochran’s Women’s Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) was training women pilots for the Air Transport Command. Considering that she might have a chance to ferry the aircraft that would fly in combat against the Japanese in China, she applied for the program. Due to a shortage of male pilots, the Women

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” p.254.

¹⁶⁸ Lai, “Roles Played by Chinese in America,” p.81; Verges, *On Silver Wings*, p.106, p.197.

Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) was created based on the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron and the WFTD in August 1943. There she completed a grueling six-month training program at Avenger Airfield in Sweetwater, Texas, where temperatures sometimes reached 130 degrees.¹⁶⁹ Hazel Ying entered the first class together with the other 131 pilots to be among the first women in history to fly for the U.S. military. "Most of her fellow students came from wealthy American families who could afford the luxury of private aviation lessons for their daughters or wives, and many of these women had attended distinguished colleges."¹⁷⁰

Marianne Verges, who has researched the lives and experiences of the WASPs, gives Hazel Ying a special introduction in her work titled *On Silver Wings*:

"When the trainees from 43-W-4, which had been in Houston, flew their PT-19s cross-country to join their classmates at Avenger, one member of the combined class stood out from the rest: Hazel Ah Ying Lee, a scrawny, boisterous, brown-skinned Chinese girl from Portland, Oregon. Her classmates agreed that Ah Ying was homely. She had buck teeth, flat features, and an even flatter chest. She wore her pitch-black hair yanked back or poked up under her cap, and from a distance it was hard to tell if Ah Ying was a man or a woman. But her handy, hearty laugh made her the favorite of everyone on the base. She also had an off-kilter brand of luck that could draw mishaps like a lightning rod."¹⁷¹

The unfeminine image and unladylike appearance distanced Hazel Ying Lee from a traditional Chinese and American woman, challenging the traditional values about family and domestic life. Hazel Ying Lee was remembered by her fly mates as a friendly Chinese American woman who was an optimist and good at cooking. "She

¹⁶⁹ Flaccus, "Chinese American WASP Losing Her Anonymity."

¹⁷⁰ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.104.

¹⁷¹ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, p.104-105.

cooked Chinese food for her WASP ferry pilots at Romulus, and she was a good cook.”¹⁷² Her talent in either finding a good Chinese restaurant or cooking tasty Chinese food reflected her inclination towards her Chinese heritage, such as language and food. Hazel Ying Lee did not encounter any racial prejudice in the WASP. “She didn’t talk about her ethnicity, and although many of her fly mates had never met a Chinese person before, they soon no longer noticed.”¹⁷³ Therefore, compared to Anna May Wong, Hazel Ying Lee experienced less obstruction in her aviation career when she established her Chinese American ethnicity and cultural identity.

Nevertheless, this is not to deny that Hazel Ying went through difficulties to fulfill her pursuit of a career as a female pilot. Kay Gott asks in her *Portrait of Hazel Ying Lee*, “Were women worse pilots? No. There are statistics showing how many hours women flew, how many airplanes they delivered, commendations from their Base Commanders. They did a good job. But it was a dangerous job. It was an exciting job. It was a lonely job.”¹⁷⁴ The female trainees were forbidden to have social contact with the staff members and civilian instructors in the WASP. They had to negotiate not only with suspicion toward their eligibility as aviators but also loneliness as an emotional subject. As they sang and moaned about their isolated life:

Girls, Girls, is our middle name
We are the girls of Sweetwater fame.
We never neck and we never pet
Give us a chance and we’ll do it yet –

¹⁷² Gott, *Hazel Ah Ying Lee*, p.1.

¹⁷³ Flaccus, “Chinese American WASP Losing Her Anonymity.”

¹⁷⁴ Gott, *Hazel Ah Ying Lee*, p.9.

Our instructors stay out late but we never get a date!¹⁷⁵

Obviously, to participate in military struggle, women sacrificed more than playing their traditional gender roles as good wives and loving mothers at home. In addition, the power relationship between women and men were reversed: women were no longer the passive participants in the male-female relationship; they had emotional appeal to men as well and often initiated actions and interactions with men. This was a significant step toward challenging the male privilege, especially men's devaluation of females. Women's practical contributions to aviation somehow transgressed the traditional image of the feminine performer.

As World War II came to its end and the Allies were ready to declare their victory, women were no longer needed in the military, and the WASP was ordered to disband.¹⁷⁶ Disappointed by the army's decision, Hazel Ying reconsidered her dream to fly for China in the future, because she thought that "the Chinese Air Force would take her more seriously because she had served in the U.S. military."¹⁷⁷ At the same time, a more liberated situation in China enabled some women to join the army as the war progressed. However, she could never make this dream come true. During her last weeks in the WASP, Hazel Ying was severely injured in an air collision when she was ferrying a fighter plane to Great Falls, Montana. Two days later, she died quietly and

¹⁷⁵ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, p.107.

¹⁷⁶ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.60.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

alone in the base hospital, and her body remained unclaimed at the military morgue in Great Falls for almost a year.¹⁷⁸

Although the female pilots were equally as well trained as the male, and the WASP was under the jurisdiction of the army, whether women pilots should be classified as military employees was a heated debate for several years.¹⁷⁹ The WASP program ended in less than a month after Hazel Ying's death. As Jaros tells, the airwomen did not belong to the emerging postwar future: not only did their progression to a new stage fail, but there was a great backslide: the female pilots vanished almost without a trace.¹⁸⁰ General Hap Arnold made the point that "keeping women pilots in service would mean replacing young men."¹⁸¹ As another Chinese American women pilot who served in the WASP, Maggie Gee felt terrible about the army's decision: "The military did not want the WASP simply because it was an all-female group."¹⁸² Ironically, it was from their wartime experience that the second-generation of Chinese American women learned that gender inequality in the United States was more oppressive than Chinese tradition. As the historian Mary Ryan points out, "rather than a genuine alteration of the rules of gender, the admission of women to the male job sector was regarded as an emergency measure, permissible

¹⁷⁸ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, p.214, p.216-17, p.227.

¹⁷⁹ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.73.

¹⁸⁰ Jaros, *Heroes Without Legacy*, p.119.

¹⁸¹ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, p.206-207.

¹⁸² Quoted in Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.73.

‘for the duration only.’”¹⁸³ It reveals that the job market in the United States had opened doors for women only when they had to either assist men who were fighting in the war or were recruited to war supporting functions. In serving in warfare, women were admitted temporarily to express their patriotism in the defense industry, but could not become their life-long career. As soon as the men returned from the war fronts, public policy reversed support for women's participation in the labor force, expected that the distribution of professional roles return to the prewar divisions they had been accustomed to. Compared to the ambiguity of national and cultural identity, the second-generation of Chinese American women, and all the other women with Caucasian background in the United States, became vulnerable to the nationalist agendas during World War II.

While most white women accepted the renewed emphasis on their central role in the family and returned to their previous life after the war, this trend, however, was not mirrored in the Chinese American communities. On the contrary, the second-generation Chinese American women were not so eager to reclaim domestic responsibilities as to retain the professional positions in the larger society. The repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws in 1943 made the Chinese immigrants eligible for citizenship and changed their status from inadmissible to admissible.¹⁸⁴ The new social circumstance not only legally accepted more Chinese immigrant women, but

¹⁸³ Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 3rd ed., New York: Franklin Watts, 1983, p.257.

¹⁸⁴ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.25.

also created a less hostile atmosphere for Chinese American women, especially for the younger generation who successfully acculturated to the white society. “Swept up by the post-World War II optimism that restored the pre-Depression belief in the American dream, suburban Chinese Americans were eager to prove their standing on the upper echelon of the economic ladder.”¹⁸⁵ In this case, for the upward mobility and socioeconomic standing, Chinese American women would like to resume their professional roles in the larger society where ethnicity was less restrictive a barrier against financial opportunity. The greater independence and opportunities these women found during wartime, and increased civil rights that allocated to them, meant that the social landscape of the mainstream society transformed for the ethnic Chinese women. However, the Chinese American women, both migrant and native to the United States, not only went through the social transformations, but also contributed to shape the dramatic changes which left an indelible imprint on the American society.

Conclusion

Although the second-generation of Chinese American women made painstaking efforts at the war front, their achievements were seldom recognized or rewarded. Hazel Ying Lee’s contribution in World War II demonstrates that women have been agents in the nationalist projects historically, and also have died along with men on the battlefields for their nation. Women, as members of the national family, were not

¹⁸⁵ Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors*, p.92.

absent from the public domain. Seeking their careers in the army to protect their nation was one of the many ways for women to enter the public sphere. As a female pilot who was inherently unconventional, she did not compromise with the strong pressure which expected her to conform to the typical image of either the Chinese or the American woman. Performing her aviation tasks during World War II together with male pilots, Hazel Ying Lee constructed her distinct femininity within the nationalist discourse and provided significant implications for other second-generation Chinese women to challenge the masculine order.

On the other hand, Hazel Ying also challenged racial hierarchies. By serving as a model of a patriotic aviator, Hazel Ying proved the outstanding ability of a nonwhite woman who could also serve and even die for her country. Since racial stereotypes were still a major obstacle for Chinese immigrants trying to integrate into U.S. society before and after the war, the second-generation of Chinese American women realized that their performance in the workplace would have a direct impact on the status of the Chinese American community and in shaping the public sentiment towards China. Many second-generation Chinese American women paid a heavy price through their engagement in defense work and military service when they tried to prove the intelligence and industriousness of Chinese people, including themselves as a Chinese American entity. To many Chinese American women, their lives were largely changed after the war. While most white middle-class American women returned to domesticity to play their traditional roles as wife and mother, the majority of

second-generation Chinese American women, as Zhao found in his research, continued to work, not necessarily relying on employment within their own communities.¹⁸⁶ The surprising phenomenon raised an assumption that Chinese cultural values were tolerant of women's accomplishments in the right circumstance when their social contributions as breadwinners outweigh the gender stereotypes as "inner-helpers." Their independence was inherited by their offspring who maintained distinct femininity through their involvement in the public sphere as well as patrilineal households. Although Hazel Ying Lee was not able to experience the day, she had served in the U.S. military and did what she enjoyed doing until the last moment of her life. Many other second-generation Chinese American women envisioned their careers during their work assignments in World War II and that was the first step toward racial and gender equality.

¹⁸⁶ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, p.74.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Over a long period of time, Chinese American women were determined by social conventions and racial and gender hierarchies both from China and the United States through their transnational experience. In countering the stereotypes of the submissive and conservative Chinese women who were confined in private places, the second-generation of Chinese American women transgressed the racial boundaries and sexual norms through the development of nationalism and feminism, claimed their new roles as Modern Girl or New Women by establishing their particular careers during World War II, which ultimately contributed to their distinct Chinese American ethnicity. This research paper navigates from the ethnic and gender bias in a masculine context and unravels how two women of the second generation of Chinese Americans broke away from the patriarchal family and became role models for other women who also pursued an American education, confronted racial discrimination, ventured into the public realm, and struggled for equal gender relations and jobs in the

Chinese American community and the U.S. mainstream society from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Through the studies of Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee, who were successful role models for their peers in the second generation of Chinese American women, my thesis attempts to demonstrate how awakening feminist consciousness and women's expectations to assume a personal career in the public sphere began to destabilize the patriarchal order during wartime. Anna May Wong embraced a cinematic career in Hollywood in order to distance herself from the traditional "girl-wife-mother" life cycle which was enforced by masculine power. Meanwhile, the exoticism and eroticism that she embodied through her presence in the films and also her real life not only reflected the changing stances of Orientalism of the white society from the pre-war period to World War II, but also created new gender relations and entangled interests of the male/female and self/other dichotomies. Hazel Ying Lee, who engaged in World War II as an aviator, established her femininity in the male-centered national project by challenging the imbalanced of power relations between powerful men and powerless women.

On the other hand, the second-generation of Chinese American women also provoked the racial hierarchies through their participation in World War II. Several of Anna May Wong' portrayals in films not only mirrored the improved US – China relations but also helped to shape a positive image and portrayal of Chinese identity to the predominantly white audience. By serving as a model of a patriotic aviator, Hazel

Ying Lee undermined the racial disputes and proved the outstanding ability of a nonwhite woman who could also serve and even die for her country. Through their efforts during World War II and contributions to their cultural and native homelands, China and the United States, they reinforced their Chinese American identity in the public sphere where their daily activities were expanded.

In order to ensure their positions in the workplace, as well as to establish their status in the mainstream society, the second-generation of Chinese American women continuously played their gender roles as New Women and Modern Girls, and maintained a distinct Chinese American ethnicity through negotiation with their Chinese heritage and their U.S. acculturation. The integration of their ethnic and gender identities in the U.S. mainstream society also demonstrated their transition from Chinatown to a modern community, in which the social hierarchies and practices were reconfigured. Images of the second-generation of Chinese American women as modern girls were reshaped in the midst of booming nationalism as well as globalization during the war and even in postwar years, and challenged the myth of a fixed definition of femininity.

On the whole, the second-generation Chinese American women who appeared in the public sphere were atypical. Many others did not have the opportunity to receive a modern education and assume employment in the larger society. As two successful career women at that time, Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee seemed to encourage American-born Chinese women to realize their individual value. These two

women did not see themselves as extraordinary, but developed great self-motivation and independence in the circumstance which generally discouraged it. They became a contemporary comment on the stereotypical roles of Chinese American women and on the sexist expectations which were still imposed on by Chinese women.

By documenting life experiences of second-generation Chinese American women, Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee precisely, this thesis delineates a transition from a Chinese to an emergent Chinese American way of life, which can be captured in the transformations that occurred in language, education, familial relationships, social activities, professions, customs and traditions, as these American-born Chinese women confronted in their daily lives. While they retained some elements of the Chinese culture through their education at home, they were simultaneously forging new and hybrid forms of life by acculturating to the American society. Compared to their mothers' generation, the second-generation of Chinese American women faced a new problem – the retention of a rapidly eroding Chinese cultural life.¹⁸⁷ What cultural elements did these women inherit from their parents' generation and what did they modify or discard when they tried to acculturate to the white society? My thesis offers some interpretations to this question.

However, this thesis overlooks the influence of Chinese women's organizations within the Chinese American community, where more average second-generation Chinese American women, whom were different from the successful career women,

¹⁸⁷ Lucie Cheng, *Linking Our Lives*, p.52.

articulated their voices. Besides, due to time and focus limitations, I was not able to tap into the archives that document Chinese American women's post-war experience, which would help to substantiate the new social circumstances and present women's new public roles. The post-war publications within and outside the Chinese American community were not referenced in this thesis. The intellectual analyses and critical comments captured in such sources might help to present new perspectives on the lives of Chinese American women at the time and create a more representative survey of the generation that may have taken Anna May Wong and Hazel Ying Lee as their role models.

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